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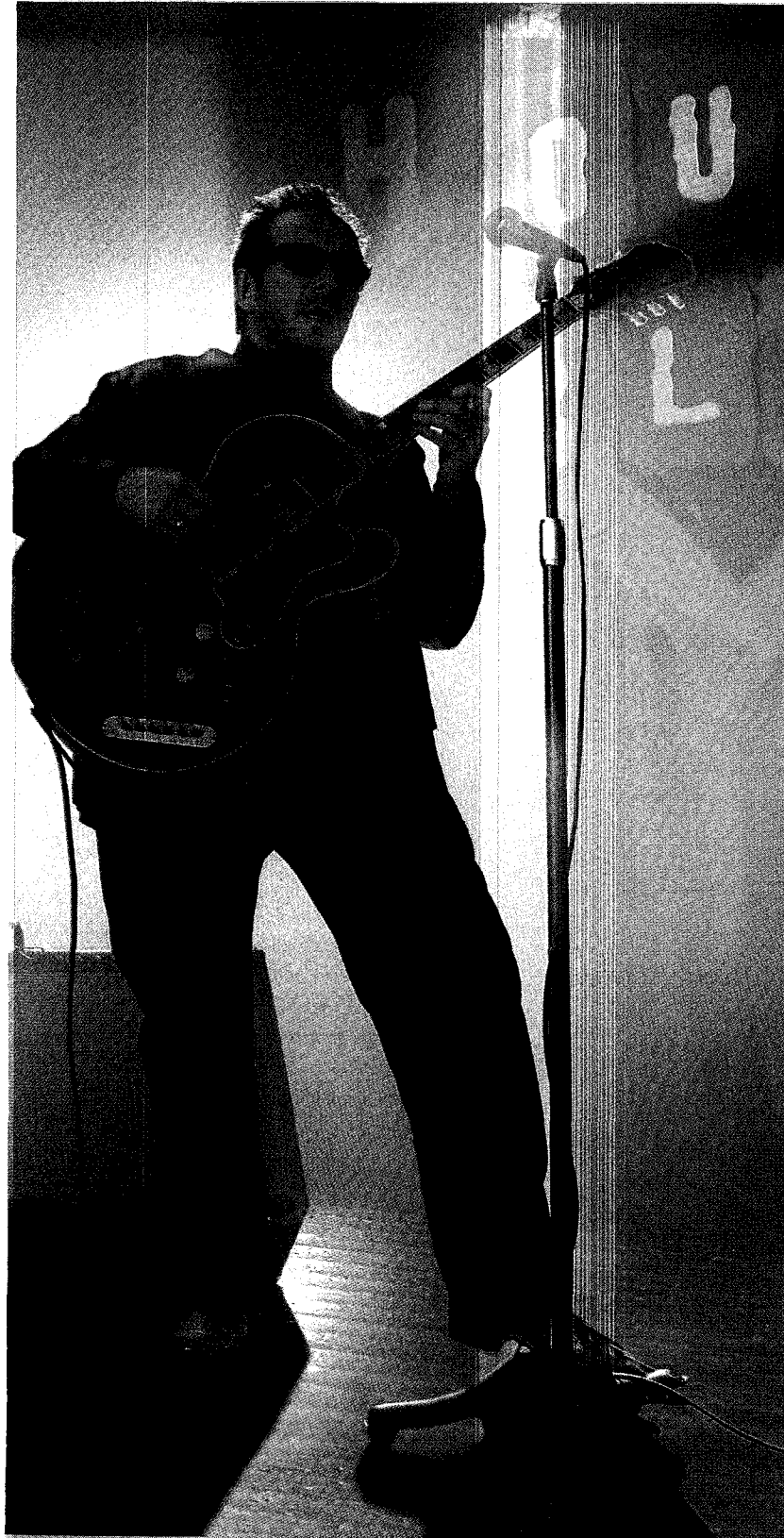


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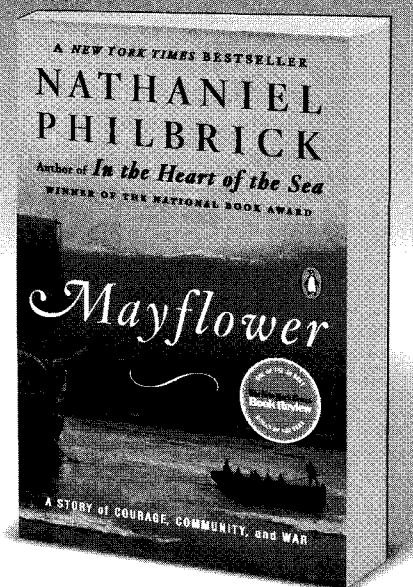
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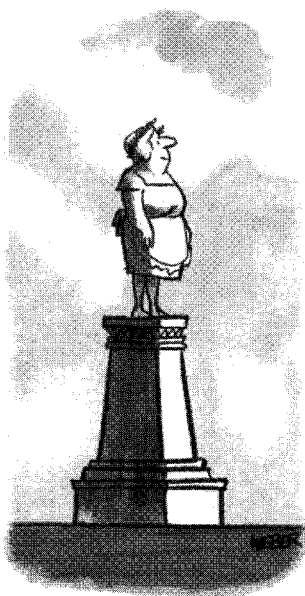
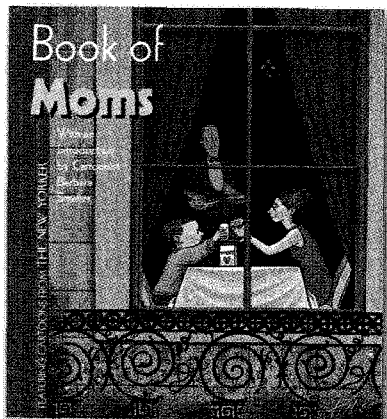
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CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey Toobin ("The CSI Effect," p. 30) will publish "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court," in September.

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Patti Smith (Poem, p. 76) is a writer, artist, and performer. Her most recent book of poems is "Auguries of Innocence," and she has just released a new album, "Twelve." She was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in March.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Larissa MacFarquhar takes readers' questions about Barack Obama, and a slide show from the campaign trail by Samantha Appleton. / A clip from the movie "Away from Her," along with the Alice Munro short story it's based on. / Sasha Frere-Jones listens to new work by Björk and Tori Amos. / Dan Baum at the Angola Prison Rodeo, and more daily dispatches from New Orleans. / From the archives: David Remnick on Ralph Ellison, Connie Bruck on Jack Valenti, and more. / A selection of articles from the current issue. / Animated cartoons; the caption contest; and a list of *New Yorker* events.



THE MAIL

MAKING A DIAGNOSIS

Jerome Groopman, in his piece on the diagnosis of bipolar disorder in children, notes the dangers of treating young patients ("What's Normal?," April 9th). However, as potent as the side effects of treatment can be, psychiatry's greater appreciation of the occurrence of bipolar disorder in childhood has led to remarkable advances in diagnosis and treatment which we feel far outweigh these drawbacks. As with adults, clear-cut cases of bipolar exist in children: those exhibiting not only extreme irritability but also at least four other symptoms, such as grandiosity, extreme overactivity, rapid flight of ideas, distractibility (during the mood episode), a driven pursuit of reckless activities without regard to consequences, decreased need for sleep, and/or pressured speech. Also like adults, children whose diagnoses are not so clear-cut require additional careful observation. Side effects are an important problem with all drugs, not just psychiatric ones, but we must also keep in mind the paucity of other options and the potentially tragic consequences of not treating young patients at all.

Joseph Biederman, M.D.

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Groopman raises concern that the media, in drawing attention to childhood bipolar disorder, may have exaggerated its prevalence and presented a misleading picture of a condition that went largely unrecognized before 2000. Clinicians who diagnose this illness face a host of problems, not the least of which is the lack of consensus criteria. Yet, when children are not diagnosed and treated appropriately,

aggressive behavior, psychosis, and even suicide are not uncommon results, often accompanied by secondary effects, including enormous family upheaval. Large-scale, evidence-based studies conducted by the Juvenile Bipolar Research Foundation and other academic researchers are now beginning to reveal the disorder's complexities, and they promise to advance the development of more specific diagnostic criteria that clinicians can use to correctly identify the earliest symptoms. This knowledge will prove invaluable in helping children and their families better manage this difficult disorder.

Demitri Papolos, M.D.

Director of Research, The Juvenile Bipolar Research Foundation

Co-Director, Program in Behavioral Genetics

*Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Bronx, N.Y.*

The crucial question when considering the issue of diagnosing bipolar affective disorder is: Why are these behaviors in children called bipolar disorder? Its symptoms occur in many psychiatric disorders, and in normal children, and the differences between adult and childhood bipolar disorders are striking. This seems to be a diagnosis that must be believed to be seen. But this is faith; and where faith and marketing dominate, science is excluded. Many studies of childhood bipolar disorder have been conducted by researchers with financial ties to the pharmaceutical industry. Stronger evidence is needed before advocating the use of powerful and expensive drugs, and burdening children and their families with the diagnosis of a major mental illness.

Nicholas Rosenlicht, M.D.

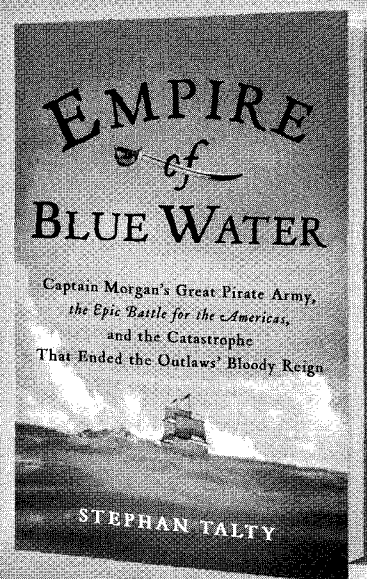
Clinical Professor

*University of California, San Francisco
School of Medicine
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Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of *The New Yorker* and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE HAVING A LAUGH

The fourth annual "Brits Off Broadway" festival begins this week and runs through July 1, at 59E59 Theatres. Highlights include Sir Alan Ayckbourne's "Intimate Exchanges," a set of eight dramas from 1984. Each play starts with the same premise and the same two actors, and each has two different possible endings. The festival marks the first time that all sixteen variations will be performed in sequence in the U.S. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE TRIPLE THREAT

The Knitting Factory hosts "3 Floors of Ska," which features twenty bands, including the local heavyweights the Toasters, who are celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary. (See page 10.)

ART WILD LIFE

The carnival atmosphere at the David Zwirner gallery in Chelsea has been amplified by the installation of work by three artists. Gordon Matta-Clark's Dumpster home has been rebuilt in one gallery, Thai food is being

cooked up (and served) for a restaging of a 1992 Rirkrit Tiravanija piece, and Yutaka Sone contributes crystal snowflakes and other off-season works. (See page 14.)

MOVIES BITS AND PIECES

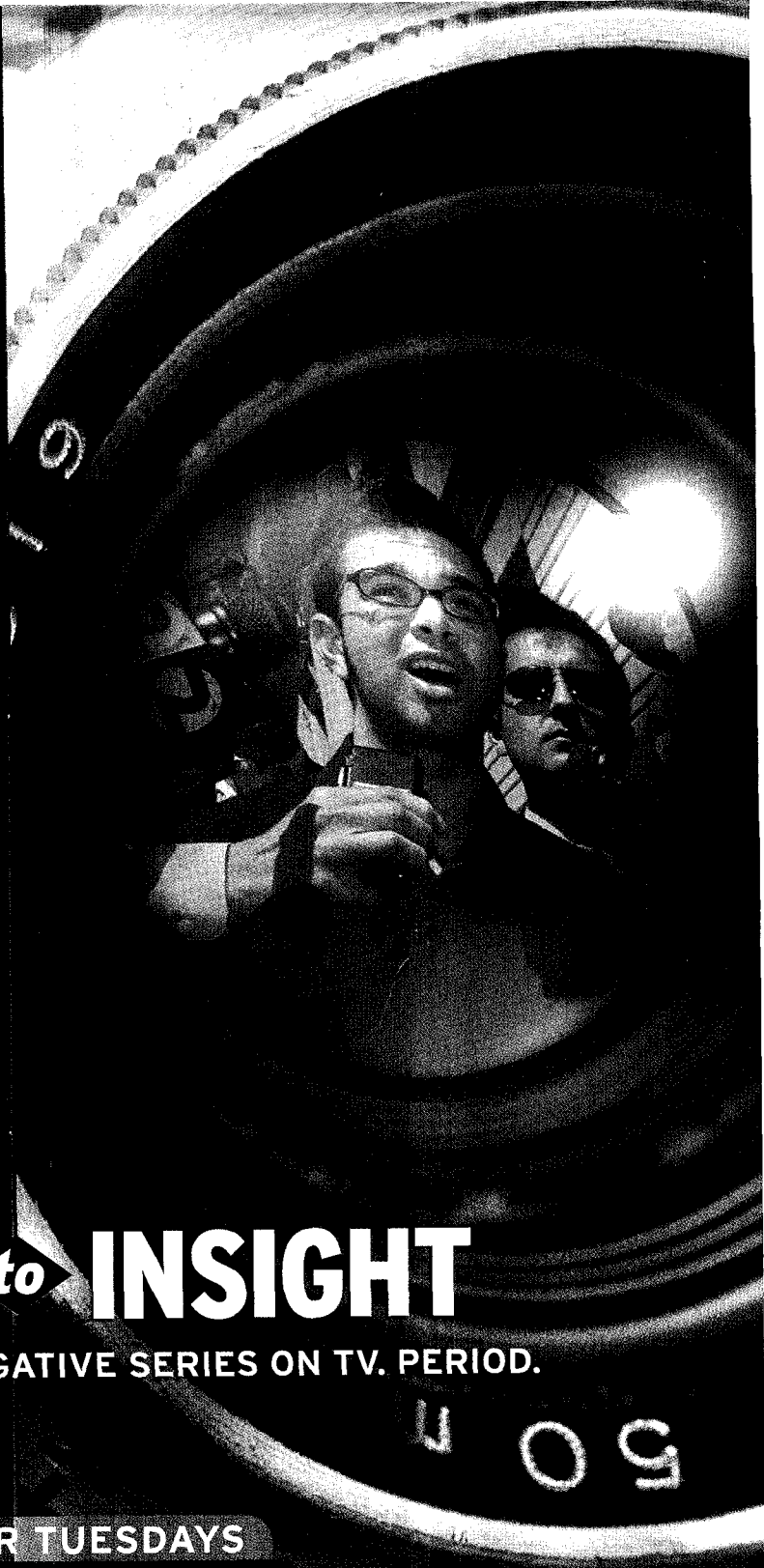
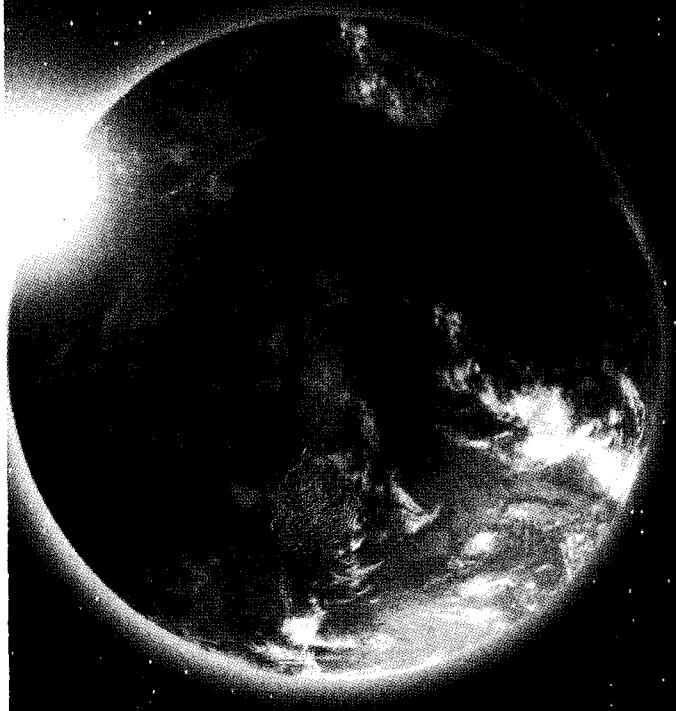
The filmmaker Emile de Antonio compiled archival footage to fierce political ends: his first film, "Point of Order," used kinescopes of the 1954 Army-McCarthy hearings. "Rush to Judgment," about the J.F.K. assassination, inspired generations of conspiracy theorists; "In the Year of the Pig," about the Vietnam War, was brought to wide

attention in this magazine by Pauline Kael in 1969. Anthology Film Archives offers a two-week series of his work. (See page 18.)

AUCTIONS AS PICTURED

The Metropolitan Opera's concourse level is full of portraits of legendary divas and divos in their most famous roles. New examples—such as Robert Wilson's video portrait of Renée Fleming as Thais—will be auctioned off this week. (See page 20.)

The Union Square Greenmarket. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK HOWL

Flamenco, you might think, is too intimate, too scream-in-the-night, to translate to film. Carlos Saura's flamenco trilogy—"Blood Wedding" (1981), "Carmen" (1983), and "Love the Magician" (1986)—proves the contrary. The standout is "Carmen," in which a modern-day choreographer (Antonio Gades) chooses as the star of his new "Carmen"-based show a beautiful, faithless girl (Laura del Sol) and



falls in love with her. You know the rest. The point, though, is the dancing. The rumble between del Sol and her rival, the great Cristina Hoyos, with their respective gangs behind them, makes the Sharks and the Jets look like pikers. In 1995, Saura created a sort of sequel, "Flamenco," with no story—just three hundred musicians and dancers doing their stuff. Vittorio Storaro shot much of the film in tight closeup, which is unkind to the dancers (you can't see their feet), but it works with the singers, and if you get to see these old guys' molars that's O.K., too. The Film Society of Lincoln Center will show "Flamenco" on April 30 and the trilogy on May 2 at the Walter Reade.

—Joan Acocella

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BEAUTY ON THE VINE

Epic Theatre Center presents a play by Zak Berkman, about the murder of a young female right-wing radio host. Opens May 2. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

BETROTHED

Rachel Dickstein wrote and directs this triptych, based on S. Ansky's "The Dybbuk," Chekhov's "Betrothed," and Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar." Previews begin May 4. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

"BRITS OFF BROADWAY"

The annual festival of British theatre kicks off with "The Receipt," by Will Adamsdale and Chris Branch, opening May 3, and "Memory," written by Jonathan Lichtenstein and directed by the Tony nominee Terry Hands, opening May 5. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

CORAM BOY

Helen Edmundson adapts Jamila Gavin's novel, about two orphans in eighteenth-century England. Melly Still directs the National Theatre production. Opens May 2. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

CYMBELINE

The British company Cheek by Jowl brings its production of the rarely staged Shakespeare play. Declan Donnellan directs. Opens May 2. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

DEUCE

Angela Lansbury and Marian Seldes star in Terrence McNally's new play, in which champion tennis doubles partners reunite. Michael Blakemore directs. In previews. Opens May 6. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DIXIE'S TUPPERWARE PARTY

Dixie Longate, a drag performer who became Tupperware's top salesperson, tells her story, in a play directed by Alex Timbers and written by Kris Andersson and Elizabeth Meriwether. In previews. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

GOD'S EAR

New Georges presents the premiere of a play by Jenny Schwartz, about a couple mourning the loss of their young son. Directed by Anne Kauffman. In previews. Opens May 7. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-868-4444.)

110 IN THE SHADE

Roundabout Theatre Company's production of the musical by Harvey Schmidt, Tom Jones, and N. Richard Nash. Audra McDonald stars; Lonny Price directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

LOVEMUSIK

Michael Cerveris and Donna Murphy star in this musical, which chronicles the romance between Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. With songs by Weill and a book by Alfred Uhry. Directed by Harold Prince. In previews. Opens May 3. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

NEW VICTORY DANISH CHILDREN'S THEATRE FESTIVAL

The New Victory Theatre offers five U.S. premieres, including "Hans Christian, You Must Be an Angel" and "Elephant and Crocodile." Opens May 4. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

PASSING STRANGE

The singer-songwriter Stew wrote the book and lyrics to this musical, about a young black bohemian's search for himself. Annie Dorsen directs; with choreography by Karole Armitage. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

RADIO GOLF

The final installment of August Wilson's ten-play cycle set in Pittsburgh's Hill District is about an African-American politician's rise to prominence in 1997. Harry Lennix and Tonya Pinkins star; Kenny Leon directs. In previews. Opens May 8. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

AMERICAN FIESTA

Steven Tomlinson, in his easygoing solo play, tackles the divisiveness of American politics as only a rabid collector of Depression-era dinnerware could. Tomlinson portrays a gay man living in Austin who is anxious to move to Vancouver with his partner so they can marry; his parents, hard-line conservatives from Oklahoma, don't take the news well. At the same time, he is drawn, almost ontologically, to Fiestaware, which he buys on eBay in the hope of assembling a perfect set. Using idiosyncratic but persuasive logic, Tomlinson ties it all together, envisioning an America in which red states and blue states, like the glazed bowls he adores so much, can be plausibly mixed and matched. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

BIOGRAPHY

The Pearl presents S. N. Behrman's 1932 comedy. (Reviewed in this issue.) (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

THE BRIG

For the second time in half a century, Judith Malina directs the Living Theatre's production of Kenneth H. Brown's countercultural landmark, which attracted the intervention of the federal government when the troupe debuted it, in 1963. As much a mind-altering substance as anything that came out of the sixties, the sly and brutal play, based on Brown's experiences in a Japanese Marine Corps prison, uses the tedium of military drills to probe the debilitating effects of authoritarianism. There's little in the way of conflict—this is Nurse Ratched's world without a McMurphy—but Malina and her committed cast make clear the psychological costs of discipline as it edges, inexorably, into sadism. (19-21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101.)

CHURCH

A one-act play by Young Jean Lee ("Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven"), about her contentious relationship with Christianity. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101.)

FROST/NIXON

The Donmar Warehouse production of Peter Morgan's drama, based on the combative interviews between former President Richard Nixon (Frank Langella, in a magnificent performance) and the British talk-show pundit David Frost (Michael Sheen), has not travelled smoothly to Broadway. The monumentality of the space—with thirty-six TV screens on the upstage wall, on which the "televised" debates can be seen—swallows up the actors, who are forced to do a lot of spinning and pacing and crossing to provide a bogus dynamism. The dialogue is still trenchant, the main performances are still vivacious and crowd-pleasing, but, in Michael Grandage's transfer, "Frost/Nixon" has become bombastic. Although the play allows Nixon a contrition and Frost a victory that don't appear in the actual interviews, Morgan, by dramatizing the making of the interviews, demonstrates that everything that rises in America converges on television, where it is necessarily theatricalized and trivialized. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/30/07.) (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

I LAND

Ma-Yi Theatre Company presents Keo Woolford's show about Hawaiian identity and hula dancing, with choreography by Rokafella and Robert Cazimero. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

JANE EYRE

Davis McCallum directs the Acting Company's moody staging of Polly Teale's adaptation, which seeks to make the madwoman in Rochester's attic at once real and a metaphor for the tensions within Jane herself. There's an innate difficulty in reconciling the high, haunted emotions of gothic romance with a contemporary, psychological explanation of the irrational—and the production attempts to have it both ways, sacrificing some force in the process. The captive Bertha (the beguiling Carrie Kawa) awaits the moment when she can burn down the house, while Rochester tantalizes Jane Eyre with an impossible offer of

TARA HARDY

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marriage. A cellist (Mina Friedman) plays a strain of sombre, discordant music to set off the struggles of these characters, whose own desires are so often irreconcilable with society's constraints. (Rose Nagelberg, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-279-4200. Through May 5.)

THE J.A.P. SHOW, JEWISH AMERICAN PRINCESSES OF COMEDY

Four loud, wry, and raunchy Jewish comedienesses—Cathy Ladman, Jessica Kirson, Jackie Hoffman, and Cory Kahaney—shake down the Actor's Temple Theatre with funny sketches and standup routines that segue into short video segments from the postwar heyday of bad Jewish gal humorists—including the “Ed Sullivan Show” regular Jean Carroll and brassy Betty Walker, whose nasal whine of a voice makes Lucille Ball seem positively demure. With hats off to these comic foremothers, the four-some channel Mae West by means of Jenny Craig, offering up Bat Mitzvah monologues, cocaine diet plans, Birmingham Jewish singles events, and dangerous lap dances as comic targets. In spite of the princess title, these brazen babes are happy to be frogs. By rights, their warts-and-all humor should earn some kisses along the way. (339 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL

A musical adaptation of the Reese Witherspoon film, about a sorority girl who ends up at Harvard Law School. Directed and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE PRESIDENT AND HER MISTRESS

A hundred and fifty years in the future, a female world President with a Southern-fried, country-music past, Beck Shine (played by Jan Buttram, who also wrote the script), rules over a world of Amazonian eroticism, subjugated men, Aussie insurgents, and invasive technology that promises an illusion of eternal youth—at considerable psychic cost. Beck's loyal love interest is her Vice-President, Kit (Sussanna Guzman), but her Achilles heel is an old flame named Paul (Danton Stone), who has his sights set on humbling the matriarchy. The play has its share of goofy laughs and campy wardrobe gags (the cast dons outfits that would make the Jetsons chartreuse with envy), but it lacks a sense of pacing: at two acts, the wackiness grows wearisome. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

The premiere of a play by Joseph Goodrich, which follows a group of employees in the break room of their workplace. Nick Faust directs. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

TRANSFIGURES

“Are religious people brain-damaged, or am I mapping the existence of God?” asks a clinical researcher studying a young man who experienced Jerusalem syndrome, a psychotic episode in which a visitor to Israel will, typically, lose touch with reality (and clothing) and do a walk-about as a Biblical figure. Lear deBessonet conceived and directed this fascinating piece, pulling text from such diverse sources as Ibsen and jailhouse interviews with John Salvi. The play is funny, chilling, enlightening, and mysterious—in short, everything an evening at the theatre should be. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200. Through May 6.)

Also Playing

BLACKBIRD: City Center, Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **HOWARD KATZ:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. Through May 6. **INHERIT THE WIND:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **JOURNEY'S END:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN:** Brooks Atkinson, 256

addition to her distinctive vocals, contributions from the hip-hop producer Timbaland and from the African artists Toumani Diabaté and Konono N°1 (see the Bowery Ballroom), among others.

BAGGOT INN

82 W. 3rd St. (212-477-0622)—May 3: The Brooklyn-based artist Andy Friedman (a contributor to this magazine) belts out country songs about love, highways, booze, and painting, with a growl that's unexpectedly tender. His first studio album, “Taken Man,” proves that beauty doesn't have to be pretty.

BARBÈS

376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—May 3: **Rachelle Garniez**, a devilishly enchanting accordionist and singer. Specializing in smart and sassy songs about urban decay and wayward girls, which offer more than a hint of nostalgia (particularly in her evocations of the East Village, Coney Island, and Rockaway Beach, circa 1981), she has a voice that can leap from the sandpaper roughness of Tom Waits to the velvety softness of a forties chanteuse.

B. B. KING BLUES

CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 3: **Front Line Assembly**, made up of veterans of the industrial scene that gave birth to bands like Nine Inch Nails, specializes in mechanized beats brimming with cacophonous clangs and malevolent, robotic vocals. Despite having never achieved the same level of success as N.I.N., this Vancouver outfit continues its relentless, electronic march as if the nineties had never ended.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 4: **Sunset Rubdown** is a side project of Spencer Krug, the keyboardist, singer, and songwriter for the celebrated Montreal band Wolf Parade. Sunset started out as a lo-fi solo effort, but Krug has since pulled together a band that includes the vocalist Camilla Wynne Ingr, formerly of Pony Up! The music is vast and varied, ranging from midway-esque riffs to headphone-ready rock. May 5: **Konono N°1**, an ensemble from the Congo, has an enticing D.I.Y. approach. They build their own microphones from car parts, and their percussion section includes pots, pans, and more car parts. Their music is distorted and raucous in the manner of the finest rock bands. May 6-8: **Beirut**, a band led by a fresh-faced youngster named Zach Condon,

has been the toast of the blogosphere and the major media for its unabashedly charming Gypsy rock. **FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA** 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 5: New York City's pan-ethnic Afro-beat orchestra **Antibalas**—the name is Spanish for “bulletproof”—takes its inspiration from the Nigerian legend Fela Kuti. The group delivers sweat-drenched live shows and extended jams with a political conscience.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—James Brown would have turned seventy-four on May 3rd. To celebrate, the **Black Rock Coalition Orchestra** assembles for what promises to be a hot night.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—May 4: **Too Much Joy**, which came out of Westchester in the eighties, is fondly remembered for its adrenaline-addled novelty songs, such as a punky retooling of LL Cool J's “That's a Lie,” from its second album of snarky rock, “Son of Sam I Am.” This is the group's first



Frank Langella and Michael Sheen in Peter Morgan's *Frost/Nixon*.

W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SPALDING GRAY: STORIES LEFT TO TELL:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-7171. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TALK RADIO:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

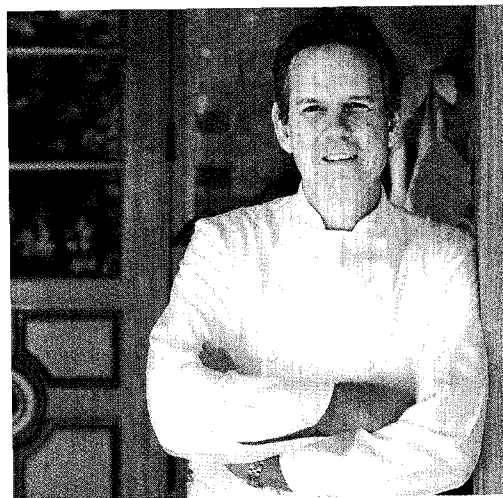
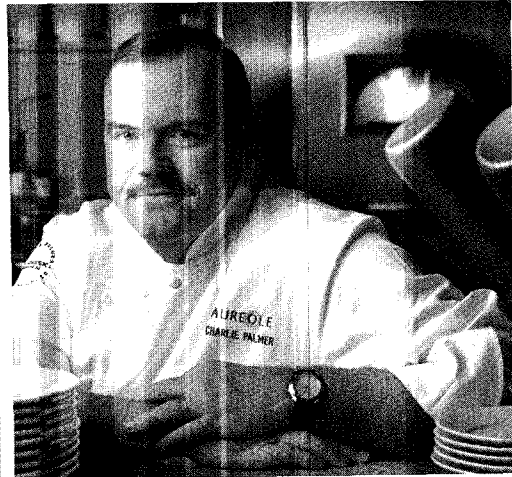
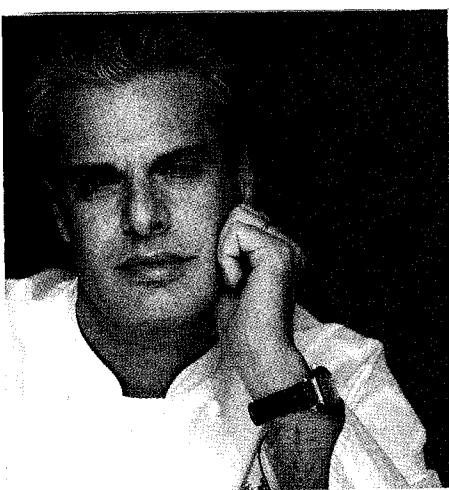
APOLLO THEATRE

253 W. 125th St. (212-531-5300)—May 8: Björk, who long ago graduated from eccentric Icelandic cult figure to eccentric international superstar, has a new album, “Volta,” that features, in

STEVE PIKE

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show in a decade. May 5-6: The "3 Floors of Ska" celebration, featuring the Toasters and other bands on the first night and the Piffers, the Scofflaws, and the like on the second.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—The Cribbs, three brothers from England who are young enough to have come of age listening to the Strokes (a band they clearly admire), enjoy poking fun at the hipster scene that they are intent on joining. They're here May 2-3 with songs from their new album, "Men's Needs, Women's Needs, Whatever."

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—May 2: Björk (see the Apollo Theatre).

ROCKS OFF CONCERT CRUISE

May 3: This floating music series presents Fishbone, whose period in the limelight is long over, but whose hybrid of funk, rock, ska, punk, and soul remains as intoxicating as it was when the band made its debut, in the mid-eighties. Back after several shifts in lineup and a six-year absence from the studio, the group has a new album, "Still Stuck in Your Throat," that doesn't miss a beat. (For more information, visit www.rocksoffnyc.com.)

UNITED PALACE

4140 Broadway, at 175th St. (212-307-7171)—May 5: Björk (see the Apollo Theatre). May 7-8: The acclaimed Montreal collective Arcade Fire.

mini festival featuring material from John Zorn's "Book of Angels" compositions. In 1993, the saxophonist and composer Zorn began writing what became known as "The Masada Songbook," a collection of more than two hundred tunes that amounted to a new form of Jewish music. It united Ornette Coleman and the Jewish scales by combining elements of not just one tradition (Ashkenazy) but of various traditions: Middle Eastern, Eastern European, classical, jazz, and the avant-garde. A few years ago, he began a follow-up project, "Masada Book Two"—a.k.a. "The Book of Angels"—and has since turned out more than three hundred additional works in the series. On May 4, the cellist Erik Friedlander performs solo, followed by the Jamie Saft trio. The following night features the Shanir Blumenkranz trio and then Zorn's Masada String Trio.

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 2-5: The death, two years ago, of the bassist Percy Heath hasn't stopped the saxophonist Jimmy Heath and the drummer Albert (Tootie) Heath from continuing with their band. The pianist Jeb Patton and the bassist David Wong round out the group here.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 2-5: Cassandra Wilson, one of the most imaginative and daring vocalists of her generation, continues transforming blues, folk, popular song, and jazz into a hybrid all her own.



TABLES FOR TWO MORANDI

211 Waverly Pl. (212-627-7575)—Keith McNally, the progenitor and reigning monarch of the imitative brasserie (Odeon, Balthazar, Pastis), has long been a master calibrator of cultural appropriation. Synthetic Frenchness comes naturally to him. Now comes Morandi, his attempt at *fasullo italiano*. Amid all the simulacra—the editions of *Corriere della Sera* hanging near the door, the rows of Chianti bottles lining the walls—the one key ingredient that seems to be missing is the artful artlessness known as *sprezzatura*. Contrivance is everywhere. Still, the room's neo-rustic ambience—low ceilings, lots of distressed wood and brick, plain tables jammed in tight—is alluring, and an agreeable counterpoint to the cheek-to-jowling of the cosmopolitan clientele. It's the kind of place where you may overhear a slick almost recognizable fellow saying to a young beauty, "I want to go apple picking with you." So what if it's April?

The fare is pan-Italian, your trattorian all-star team. The chef is Jody Williams, formerly of Gusto, around the corner, and she has brought along some of her mainstays, such as lightly fried artichokes, the Sicilian-style meatballs with pine

nuts and raisins, and the fried pork-stuffed olives. In the months since Morandi opened, the food, apparently, has improved (a few early reviews were vicious), although now and then something, say, a dry Bolognese sauce, causes one to wonder how to say "Nyeah" in Italian. (Funny, because the restaurant's namesake, the painter Giorgio Morandi, was from Bologna.) Other dishes, such as a hulking veal chop crusted with prosciutto and Fontina and accompanied by a luscious polenta, may inspire a fervent "Madonna!" There's a terrific wine list, for Brunello and Barbaresco fanatics, but you can happily get by on the array of house wines that come in carafes. Try not to linger, because in the land of McNally turnover is king. Still, little gestures of generosity abound. If a dirty Martini isn't dirty enough, the bartender doesn't just drizzle in a bit more olive juice: he makes a new one from scratch. And if you drop it he won't make a fuss. (Open weekdays for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées \$18-\$45.)

—Nick Paumgarten

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—May 5: Ted Leo, a veteran of the fertile eighties hardcore scene in Washington, D.C., sings intricately worded songs that are as kinetic and catchy as they are whip-smart.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ABRONS ARTS CENTER

466 Grand St., at Pitt St. (212-598-0400)—"Blurring Boundaries," a new series curated by the former owners of the downtown club Tonic, which recently went out of business, gets under way with a

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 2-6: The Kenny Garrett/Pharoah Sanders Band. Two decades may separate the saxophonists Garrett and Sanders in age, but a collective passion for intense improvising and soulful playing—not to mention an obvious devotion to the aesthetic of John Coltrane, with whom Sanders worked in the mid-nineteen-sixties—unifies their collaborative efforts. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator Les Paul. The Mingus Big Band takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ GALLERY

290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—May 3: The trumpeter Roy Hargrove, a good friend of this intrepid club devoted to up-and-coming performers, fronts a big band.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 3-6: The Turtle Island String Quartet. On its new album, "A Love Supreme: The Legacy of John Coltrane," this San Francisco-based group recontextualizes such Coltrane classics as "Naima" and "Moment's Notice."

MERKIN CONCERT HALL

129 W. 67th St. (212-501-3330)—May 7: While it may not seem like just yesterday that the bassist Ron Carter was helping to reinvent modern jazz with the Miles Davis quintet, it's still mind-boggling to imagine this ubiquitous, ever youthful musical presence turning seventy, which he does this month. To celebrate, Carter assembles his cello-heavy nonet; the excellent pianist Aaron Goldberg kick-starts the evening with a trio.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—The trumpeter David Weiss, a devotee of sixties-era modern jazz, leads the historically savvy band New Jazz Composers Octet. He's here on May 4 with a scaled-down band, a quintet, that will easily fill this blissfully unamplified performance space with high-spirited sounds.

THE STONE

Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Fred Frith, the guitarist, composer, improviser, and mainstay of the downtown scene for nearly three decades (even if he does live in California), is the curator here in May. On the 4th and 5th, the group Death Ambient, a trio he formed with the bassist Kato Hideki and the drum-machine maven Ikue Mori in the mid-nineties, celebrates the release of "Drunken Forest," the group's third album on John Zorn's Tzadik label. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 1-6: The Jeremy Pelt quartet. He's been featured with a plethora of ensembles, big and small, since hitting the city in the late nineties, but the trumpeter Pelt is at his unshackled best fronting his own hard-bop quartet. The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra holds sway on Mondays.

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden reopens on May 1, with Frank Stella as this summer's featured artist. Recent works in stainless steel and carbon fiber will be on view outdoors; indoors, "Frank Stella: Painting into Architecture" will present the prolific artist's designs for architectural structures. Also opens May 1. ♦ The Met's new permanent Greek and Roman galleries are now open. ♦ "Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797." Through July 8. ♦ "Barcelona and Modernity: Gaudi to Dalí." Through June 3. ♦ "Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate." Through May 20. ♦ "One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement." Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Projects 85: Dan Perjovschi" opens on May 2. In the two weeks leading up to the opening, the Romanian artist can be seen working in the galleries, making the politically themed wall drawings that will comprise his installation. ♦ "Artistic Collaborations: Fifty Years at Universal Limited Art Editions." Through May 21. ♦ "Live/Work: Performance Into Drawing." Through May 21. ♦ "Jeff Wall," a mid-career survey of the Canadian photographer's work. Through May 14. ♦ "Comic Abstraction: Image Making, Image Breaking." Through June 11. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—"The Hugo Boss Prize 2006: Tacita Dean." Through June 6. ♦ "The Shapes of Space" will open in stages throughout the summer, as restoration work on the Guggenheim's flagship building progresses. Among the

works will be installations by Pipilotti Rist, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Piotr Ulanowski. Through Sept. 5. ♦ "Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum: Restoring a Masterpiece." Through July 8. ♦ "Divisionism/Neo-Impressionism: Arcadia and Anarchy." Through Aug. 6. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—"Lincoln Kirstein" honors the great esthete, connoisseur, and impresario on what would have been the centenary of his birth, with an exhibition of work by three artists he championed: Walker Evans, Elie Nadelman, and Pavel Tchelitchew. Through Aug. 27. ♦ "Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure." Through June 3. ♦ "Lorna Simpson." Through May 6. ♦ "Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar." Through June 24. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—"George Stubbs (1724-1806): A Celebration." Through May 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—"A New Light on Tiffany." Through May 28. ♦ "Audubon's Aviary: Natural Selection." The museum's third exhibition of watercolors made in preparation for the mammoth "Birds of America" is accompanied by videos, artifacts, and recordings of the birds' songs. Through May 20. ♦ "The World of Asher B. Durand: The Artist in Antebellum New York." Through Sept. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—"Vik Muniz: Reflex." Through May 7. ♦ "Tom Sandberg: Photographs 1989-2006." Through May 7. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—"Philosophy of Time Travel," a collaborative installation made by Edgar Arceneaux, Vincent Galen Johnson, Olga Koumoundouros, Rodney McMillian, and Matthew Sloy. Through July 1. ♦ "Henry Taylor: Sis and Bra." Through July 1. ♦ "Silhouette: Collection in Context." In a thematic grouping of works from the permanent collection, a consideration of the black-and-white starkness of cut-paper designs is expanded to photographs, drawings, and sculpture. Alison Saar's hoochy-coochy gals painted inside old glass bottles are trapped like 2-D genies for ogling; in a 1956 Roy DeCarava photo of a couple dancing, a woman in a narrow white sheath becomes a sort of reverse silhouette. Introducing a more oblique logic are text-based works by Glenn Ligon and William Pope.L and Robert Pruitt's draped gold chains tracing the cross-continental routes of the slave trade. Kara Walker, the most prominent and cogent modern practitioner of this old form, is represented with a rotating magic lantern and a small cut-paper work. Through July 1. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

BLINKY PALERMO

An artist who would take the pseudonym Blinky Palermo obviously had a sense of humor. Palermo (1943-1977) studied with Joseph Beuys at the influential Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and evolved a working practice marked by wit and precision. A small exhibition showcases his complete prints and multiples, which in turn focus on a palette of chosen shapes—a gray blob, a black square, red squares, a green or blue triangle. A sequence of flipped grid segments documents wall drawings he made in Munich in 1968, and a pair of black triangles, one plain, the other sheathed in mirror, pay homage to another sil-

rhymor of minimal means, Thelonious Monk. Through May 5. (Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677.)

TOD PAPAGEORGE

Papageorge, who has proven considerably more influential as a professor and director of the Yale School of Art than he has as a photographer, reasserts his artistic claims with a terrific show of photos called "Passing Through Eden." Made in Central Park between 1967 and 1991, these black-and-white images touch lightly on a number of park activities, including reading, exercising, and congregating before or after demonstrations. But Papageorge's most memorable pictures are of lovers and sunbathers, who treat the site like a sensual oasis. One woman swoons backward atop her boyfriend, his naked leg arching between hers. Through May 12. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

TION COLLECTION": Austrian Cultural Forum, 11 E. 52nd St. 212-319-5300. Through May 3.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DELIA BROWN

Pauline Kael described "Les Biches," Claude Chabrol's 1968 film about love affairs among an heiress, an artist, and an architect, as "a languorous exercise in classy eroticism"—a description that applies just as easily to Brown's small drawings reimagining scenes from that movie in contemporary New York. The heiress (here called Caprice, and drawn as a self-portrait) lounges in a white coat and watches the artist (called Felicity) at work in a park; her predatory gaze suggests seduction, the acquisitive



"Waitress," the last film written and directed by the late Adrienne Shelly, opens May 2.

STEVE PYKE

Pyke, a staff photographer for this magazine, shows eleven black-and-white portraits of (mostly) famous people. Although a few of the prints are imposingly big, the impact of Pyke's work is hardly dependent on scale; he allows larger-than-life subjects (including Norman Mailer, Richard Serra, and Kurt Vonnegut) to dominate but never loses control of the frame. The aging activist Bobby Seale, gesturing toward the camera, looks all the more fragile for his aggressiveness, but Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, in half-shadowed profile, projects the unruffled assurance and contained physicality of a proletarian hero in a Diego Rivera mural. Through May 5. (Flowers, 1000 Madison Ave., at 77th St. 212-439-1700.)

Short List

WILLIAM KLEIN: Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through June 2. **JAMES WELLING:** Horticultural Society of New York, 148 W. 37th St., 13th fl. 212-757-0915, ext. 113. Through June 29. **"FOR A SPECIAL PLACE: DOCUMENTS AND WORKS FROM THE GENERALI FOUNDA-**

lust of the collector, and the allure of bohemian life. Sex, violence, and conversation over drinks ensue; the relationship is a tug-of-war that pits wealth and comfort against art and freedom. Despite the modesty of the medium, the drawings are creamy confessions—they look luxurious, in fact. The melodramatic battle between Caprice and Felicity is played out as much in the style of the drawings as it is in their content. Through May 5. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

WALTER DE MARIA

A pair of works related to the famous "Broken Kilometer" (on permanent view at the Dia space at 393 West Broadway). Both are floor-based arrays of perfectly aligned shiny metal rods, which appear to be, but are not, identical. "A Computer Which Will Solve Every Problem in the World," made in 1984 and installed on Twenty-first Street, is a simple device for counting from three to twelve—and thinking carefully in the process about perception, sameness, and variation. Solid meters of stainless steel are arranged in rows, with three rods in the first row, four in the second, and so forth, up to twelve. Those in the "three" row are triangular, the next quadrangular,

etc. The series continues with "13, 14, 15 Meter Rows," from 1985, on Twenty-fourth Street. Through May 5. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111, and 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717.)

JH ENGSTRÖM / LEIGH LEDARE / ARI MARCOPOULOS

Three photographers whose subjects are personal invite us into their world but don't provide any reliable maps of the territory. Marcopoulos, with fifty unframed snaps of family, extreme-sports pals, road-kill, graffiti, and California beaches, has the show's most accessible material (his huge black-and-white Xerox of a bruised elbow is a minimalist high point). Engström, a Swede who makes his U.S. debut here, is darker, sexier, and more enigmatic; his private landscape is as bleak as Nan Goldin's and just as intriguing. But Ledare, still in the Columbia M.F.A. program, makes the biggest, most unforgettable impact with photos of his naked, nutty mother that rival Robert Melees for their out-of-control Oedipal undertow. Through May 5. (Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 19th St. 212-206-8710.)

SYLVIA SLEIGH

Campy, saccharine, and confrontational, Sleigh's paintings are not in good taste, which is why they're such fun. These eleven canvases were made as early as 1963 and as recently as 2007. But they exist in a honeyed twilight where literate, intelligent people—people with taste—disport themselves according to pictorial rules of fêtes champêtres and odalisques. In these portraits, a nude woman's tan lines contrast starkly with her patterned bedspread and wallpaper, a come-hither naked man reclines on a bright-orange chaise, and a guy in a big Afro and tiny cut-offs stands in a riotous flower garden. Through May 10. (I-20, 557 W. 23rd St. 212-645-1100.)

SHINIQUE SMITH / MICKALENE THOMAS

Two artists take on pop culture and Pop stylings to excellent and widely varying effect. Thomas's glossy and cartoon-direct paintings depict black female icons with humor and a sparkle that goes beyond their rhinestone-encrusted surfaces. "Lovely Six Foota," a lanky beauty with an Afro and a wood-paneled den, embodies seventies glamour, while a



Zach Condon's Gypsy rock ensemble, Beirut, plays at the Bowery Ballroom May 6-8.

JULIE EVANS / SALLY GALL

Evans's small and potentially colorful paintings on panel bear swirly patterns, often made with the aid of a Spirograph, that recall Indian designs, mandalas, flowers, and celestial maps. They look brightly companionable with Gall's photographs, all taken in Central Park, of flowers and sky. Through May 5. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

JONATHAN LASKER

Lasker's abstractions have a childlike appearance due to their use of big, overstated brushstrokes, primary and secondary colors, and doodly networks of lines. The simplicity is deceptive, of course: passages that from a distance resemble exuberant exercises in finger painting are full of delicate, intricate patterns. There's a hangover of Philip Guston and the battle between "sophisticated" abstraction and homespun mark-making. Lasker gives works titles like "Reason and Free Will" and "The Quotidian and the Question," but even here one senses a playful, ironic approach to big questions, rather than the Sturm und Drang favored by older generations of postwar painters. Through May 5. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

GORDON MATTA-CLARK AND RIRKRI TIRAVANIJJA

Guerilla glee still wafts from Matta-Clark's "Open House," a Dumpster partitioned with walls and doors to make an absurd apartment, which the artist parked in a SoHo street in 1972 and filled with friends. It was an inspired idea to pair Matta-Clark's documenting film and a reconstruction of the Dumpster with a restaging of Tiravanija's "Untitled 1992 (Free)." Tiravanija's was a giveaway performance, in which the exhibition space of the 303 gallery was filled with the contents of the office and storeroom so the artist could cook Thai curry in the back. Zwirner's staff is faithfully cooking more gratis Thai food, with Tiravanija's makeshift kitchen set up in a plywood shell built to the exact dimensions of the original 303 space. Visitors bang through the "Open House" doors, watch the film, and then sit down to eat. Through May 5. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

series of smaller panels pairs portraits of Condi Rice (with stern brow) and Oprah Winfrey (usually beaming); it's obvious which is America's sweetheart. Smith had a sideline as a graffiti tagger while she was studying fine art, and both traditions are evident in her concatenations of cast-off clothing, text, fabric scraps, and paint. "A Bull a Rose a Tempest" binds Tupac tees, sneakers, a vinyl bag, and a feather boa into a tight black bundle, a wad of street culture roped into an elegantly compact form. Through May 12. (Golden, 539 W. 23rd St. 212-727-8304.)

YUTAKA SONE

Sone's array of crystal snowflakes and little acrylic paintings about ski lifts at first has the air of a chalet gift shop, but it quickly becomes more interesting. Sone's subject is leisure and landscape, which he addresses without being didactic or mindlessly permissive. The tight paintings feature goggled individuals careening toward the picture plane; the hand-carved snowflakes are (of course) unique but appear meltingly indistinct. In a separate gallery, a sunset-orange backdrop frames a table littered with elephant figurines. The savanna is paired with the glacier, the haphazard with the deluxe. Through May 5. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

Short List

KEVIN LANDERS: Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through May 12. **SEAN LANDERS:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through June 16. **ALEX-ANDER LEE:** Clementine, 623 W. 27th St. 212-243-5937. Through May 26. **DANA SCHUTZ:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through May 19. **JAMES WELLING:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through May 5.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

The company launches its new evening-length production of "Romeo + Juliet," choreographed by

Peter Martins and designed by the abstract Danish painter Per Kirkeby. As in other Martins ballets, the focus is on speed, virtuosity, and youth, showcasing the freshness and technical aplomb of the junior end of the company's roster. The sprightly Sterling Hyltin will dance the role of Juliet at the company gala (with the nineteen-year-old Robert Fairchild as her Romeo), followed by a selection of up-and-coming ballerinas, including Kathryn Morgan, the indomitable Tiler Peck, and the apprentice Erica Pereira (all three are eighteen years old). The pace is intense: there are no pauses between scenes, and the set changes happen with the curtain open, hurtling the lovers toward their inexorable, tragic destiny. Casts appear on the company's Web site a week in advance. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. May 1-2 and May 8 at 7:30, May 3-4 at 8, May 5 at 2 and 8, and May 6 at 3. Through June 24.)

"ORFEO ED EURIDICE"

Mark Morris's directorial debut at the Met is historic—the last choreographer to direct there was Balanchine, in 1953—but Morris is no stranger to opera. Baroque operas have inspired much of his best choreography, and this production marks his third take on Gluck's 1762 work. Twenty-two dancers, including members of Morris's company, join a huge chorus and the countertenor David Daniels to make this a dance event as much as a musical one. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. May 2 at 8 and May 5 at 1:30. Through May 12.)

ALONZO KING'S LINES BALLET

King clearly has an eye for dancers, as his exceptional San Francisco-based ensemble will demonstrate in its weeklong engagement at the Joyce. The program includes two recent works, "Migration"—a reflection on the evolution of forms—and "The Moroccan Project," a hyperkinetic work set to North African music, from Bedouin and Berber songs to Gnawan chants. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 1-2 at 7:30, May 3-5 at 8, and May 6 at 2 and 7:30.)

CHAMECKILERNER

Recently, the Brazilian-born duo of Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner sent a video to their colleagues announcing their intention to commit suicide. The recipients were interviewed, and their filmed responses serve as running commentary during performances of "Exit." The choreographers themselves are absent, replaced onstage by the capable Erin Cornell and Caitlin Marz, who flop and roll through a duet that's both formal and sensual. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-2793. May 1-5 at 8.)

PHILIPPA KAYE COMPANY

The witty, science-inspired choreographer presents "Landing Strip," a new solo that finds humor by juxtaposing human and bird flight, and "Zoo Parts," a series of animal courtship dances that's also a preview of the water buffalo, baboon, and inchworm representations Kaye will set loose in the Prospect Park Zoo in July. (University Settlement, 184 Eldridge St. 212-545-5322. May 1-3 at 8.)

"COMMITMENT AND GRACE:"

THE FILMS OF CARLOS SAURA

As part of a retrospective, the Film Society of Lincoln Center screens the Spanish director's great flamenco trilogy—"Blood Wedding," "Carmen," and "Love the Magician"—made in collaboration with the dancer and choreographer Antonio Gades. (Walter Reade, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5600. May 2 at noon, 1:30, and 3:30.)

LAVA

The all-female troupe likes to structure its acrobatic displays around natural-science themes. In the latest, "Tides," the titular theme plays out in ebbing and flowing lines of performers, video of crashing surf, and a full audience wave. Sections repeat so that intrepid viewers can join in, yet, as usual, the chief appeal of the show lies less in its intermittent moments of invention than in its continual come-as-you-are warmth. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. May 3-5 at 7 and May 6 at 5. Through May 27.)

ANDRÉ GINGRAS/KORZO PRODUCTIONS

From the Netherlands, Danspace Project imports the dystopian fantasy "CYP17." A disturbed man in a white-walled cell goes into spasms, and rants about an alien takeover and the C.I.A. When someone throws in a bone and a disassembled mannequin,

YUKO SHIMIZU

his fumbling reactions take on a Chaplinesque humor. Meanwhile, digital images flash by, and voice-overs offer cautionary tales of genetic manipulation. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. May 3-5 at 8:30.)

RAGAMALA MUSIC AND DANCE THEATRE

This Minneapolis-based company blends the rhythmic footwork and highly articulated, pictorial hand gestures of bharata natyam with a less specific modern-dance vocabulary. For its New York debut at the New Victory, the dancers will perform to an eclectic selection of music, including a Japanese taiko-drum ensemble and recordings by the Afro-funk group Zap Mama. (209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. May 4 at 7, May 5 at 2 and 7, and May 6 at noon and 5. Through May 13.)

"IN THE COMPANY OF MEN"

Dance New Amsterdam's annual series is of male dancers (who perform in it), by male dancers (who choreograph it), and for male dancers (who are offered role models). This year's program includes two solos and a new duet choreographed by dre.dance's Taye Diggs and Andrew Palermo and a performance by the flamboyant Brian Brooks of his own disco-punk solo. (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. May 4-5 at 8 and May 6 at 3. Through May 13.)

AMERICAN REPERTORY BALLET

Graham Lustig's New Jersey-based ensemble returns to Symphony Space with Twyla Tharp's "Octet" (1991), a cool study in partnering for four couples in which the women always seem to be a step ahead of the men, and several New York premieres, including a commission from the former N.Y.C.B. dancer Melissa Barak. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 4-5 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

For the last new production of his first season, Peter Gelb reaches back into Met history to offer the house's first presentation in thirty-five years of Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice" (in the original, Vienna version), which will be thoroughly reenergized by the kinetic genius of the director and choreographer Mark Morris. David Daniels and Maija Kovalevska take the title roles, with Heidi Grant Murphy as Amor; James Levine conducts. (May 2 at 8 and May 5 at 1:30.) ♦ Erika Sunnegårdh takes the demanding title role of Puccini's "Turandot," with Liping Zhang and Richard Margison as Liù and Calaf, respectively; Marco Armiliato, who has emerged this season as more than just the Met's hardest-working Italian hand, conducts. (May 3 and May 8 at 7:30.) ♦ The Met's new production of Puccini's three gorgeous one-acts, "Il Trittico," is opera at its "settiest." The opener, "Il Tabarro," for example, boasts a giant tugboat, a bridge long enough to cross the real Seine, and a whole arrondissement of warehouses; the comic third act, "Gianni Schicchi," includes a backdrop of the entirety of Florence. Such onstage spectacles are matched by the grand pit work of Levine and a cast that features the passionate Salvatore Licita and Maria Guleghina in "Il Tabarro," the swaggering Alessandro Corbelli in "Schicchi," and the rock-solid Stephanie Blythe and the affectingly delicate Barbara Frittoli in the sentimental middle act, "Suor Angelica." The direction, by Jack O'Brien, a Met debutant, is broad and simplistic but doubtless hits home in the back rows. (May 4 at 8 and May 7 at 7:30.) ♦ "Il Barbiere di Siviglia," with Joyce DiDonato, Russell Braun, Lawrence Brownlee, John Del Carlo, and Samuel Ramey; Maurizio Benini. (May 5 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

"THE TRISTAN PROJECT"

The Peter Sellars production of Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde," which originated with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic (who perform it in New York), uses the video imagery of Bill Viola, projected onto a thirty-three-foot-wide screen, to explore the work's passions through the metaphors of fire and water. Christian Franz and Christine Brewer sing the title roles, with John Rel-

yea as King Mark and Anne Sofie von Otter as Brangäne. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. May 2 at 6 and May 5 at 2.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

CURTIS INSTITUTE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Since the Philadelphia Orchestra is the ultimate destination for so many graduates of that city's august conservatory, Christoph Eschenbach, the orchestra's music director, is the natural choice to lead the Curtis ensemble at Carnegie Hall. Roberto Diaz, the institute's new president, will be the soloist in Penderecki's Viola Concerto in a concert that also features Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" and Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story." (212-247-7800. May 2 at 8.)

LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC

Esa-Pekka Salonen and his ensemble, in between two "Tristans," offers a concert featuring a selection of operatic arias by Strauss (from "Arabella" and "Die Liebe der Danae") and Korngold with the soprano Renée Fleming, along with Sibelius's "Lemminkäinen Suite." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. May 3 at 8.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Janine Jansen, a striking young Dutch violinist whose background in Baroque music keeps her Romantic interpretations from becoming saccharine, will be the soloist in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in a program with the conductorless chamber orchestra, the rest of which—Schumann's Second Symphony and two works by Poul Ruders—sounds ambitious indeed. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 5 at 8.)

CANTICUM NOYUM SINGERS:

LONGFELLOW 200TH BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE

Harold Rosenbaum's adventurous and expert chorus celebrates the seminal, if underrated, American bard with performances of works set to his poetry by Sullivan, Elgar, Ned Rorem, the Broadway composer Stephen Schwartz, and David Del Tredici ("Paul Revere's

Ride"), who is celebrating an important birthday (seventy) of his own this year. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. 212-279-4200. May 5 at 8.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

Christoph Eschenbach, doing triple duty at Carnegie Hall this week, conducts his ensemble (and David Hayes's Philadelphia Singers Chorale) in the finale of the orchestra's New York season, Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony, with the soprano Simona Šaturová and the mezzo-soprano Yvonne Naef as soloists. (212-247-7800. May 8 at 8.)

RECITALS

"GIL SHAHAM AND FRIENDS"

The plush-toned violinist concludes a series of Brahms concerts, collaborating with the pianist Akira Eguchi and the cellist Alisa Weilerstein, among others, in the Violin Sonata No. 3 in D Minor and the String Sextet No. 1 in B-Flat Major. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. May 2 at 7:30.)

"GRAB IT!: THE MUSIC OF JACOB TV"

Jacob ter Veldhuis has been called the Jeff Koons of music: he synthesizes dance beats with wistful bits of classical styles, interrupting the flow with Steve Reich-style tape loops made of fragments of American cultural flotsam ranging from the sublime (a Billie Holiday interview) to the ridiculous (a body-building infomercial). The Whitney Museum presents a three-concert romp through a whole swath of his works, featuring such versatile American musicians as the Prism Saxophone Quartet and the pianist Kathleen Supové. (Whitney at Altria, Park Ave. at 42nd St. May 2-4 at 8. No tickets required.)

EVGENY KISSIN

The Russian pianist, who has long since transitioned from boy wonder to cult figure, offers a program of works by Schubert (the Sonata in E-Flat Major, D. 568), Beethoven, Brahms (the



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK SOUL OF INVENTION

Vik Muniz, whose compact survey, "Reflex," closes soon at P.S. 1, is too clever for his own good. Never one to repeat himself, Muniz has made photographs of chocolate syrup, caviar, dust, diamonds, spaghetti, string, sugar, and the contents of a junk yard in Brazil. Using



these substances as drawing mediums, he's re-created key bits of the universal image bank: a double Mona Lisa in peanut butter and jelly, the Hindenburg disaster in black ink. But, instead of being thrilled by his inventiveness, we've come to take it for granted, and when the fruits of all this cunning hyperactivity are gathered in one place it's easy to lose sight of the artist's sustained, show-after-show achievement. So spend some time in the closet-like space that houses an ongoing project called "The Weimar File." Under a bare bulb are four hundred and forty-five small black-and-white photos that look like they were rescued from East German police files. Evidence of nothing but the malevolent paranoia of the state—any state—these pictures of broken eyeglasses, homemade bombs, and empty prison cells, a few appropriated, most newly made by Muniz, prove he's never too restless to top himself.

—Vince Aletti

Six Piano Pieces, Op. 118), and Chopin at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800. May 3 at 8.)

"ZOOM": ANNIE GOSFIELD

Merkin Concert Hall's "Composers Close Up" series turns to Gosfield, a youngish American who is emerging as a major figure of the downtown scene with pieces that use nonmusical sounds (warped records, satellite signals, and more) in a strikingly expressive manner. A host of New York's new-music stars—including the bassist Robert Black and the violinist Nurit Pacht—perform a selection of her works. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 3 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC

May 4 at 8: Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Chamber Ensemble makes a visit to the floating chamber-music series, performing two plangent works by renowned Russians (Glinka's "Trio Pathétique" and Rachmaninov's "Trio Élégiacque") along with music by Haydn, Debussy, and Martinů. ♦ May 5 at 8 and May 6 at 4: The violinist Mark Peskanov joins some friends for a program of music for strings by Haydn, Mozart (the String Quintet in C Major), and Dvořák. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

LOOK AND LISTEN FESTIVAL

The Betty Cunningham gallery is the scene for the finale of a three-concert series that brings cutting-edge music into settings adorned with contemporary art; the evening's performers (including Ethel, QQQ, and So Percussion) venture works by such composers as Don Byron, Mary Ellen Childs, and Paul Lansky. (541 W. 25th St. 718-622-3005. May 5 at 8. For complete listings, see www.lookandlisten.org.)

CONCERTANTE

The vibrant young string sextet, long adept at blending new works into traditional yet imaginative programs, offers the New York premiere of Jonathan Leshnoff's String Sextet, bookended by Mozart's String Quintet in G Minor and the string-sextet version of Strauss's "Metamorphosen." (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 6 at 3.)

MATTHIAS GOERNE AND CHRISTOPH ESCHENBACH

Eschenbach, who was an esteemed pianist long before he became a world-class conductor, accompanies the intensely focussed baritone, who brings his pitch-black voice to complete song cycles by Schumann (the Heine "Liederkreis") and Brahms (including the "Four Serious Songs"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 7 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

AWAY FROM HER

Sarah Polley directed this drama, based on a story by Alice Munro, originally published in this magazine, about a woman with Alzheimer's who falls in love with a fellow-patient. Starring Julie Christie, Olympia Dukakis, and Gordon Pinsent. Opening May 4. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

CIVIC DUTY

A thriller about a man who becomes obsessed with his Muslim neighbor. Directed by Jeff Renfro. Opening May 4. (In wide release.)

THE FLYING SCOTSMAN

A drama about a man who builds a racing bicycle from scrap metal. Starring Jonny Lee Miller; directed by Douglas Mackinnon. Opening May 4. (Empire 25.)

L'ICEBERG

A comedy from Belgium about a woman who, after being locked in cold storage, becomes obsessed with icebergs. Directed by and starring Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon, and Bruno Romy. In French. Opening May 4. (Cinema Village.)

LUCKY YOU

Curtis Hanson directed this drama, set in the world of high-stakes poker, starring Eric Bana, Drew Barrymore, and Robert Duvall. Opening May 4. (In wide release.)

PARIS, JE T'AIME

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 4. (Paris and Sunshine Cinema.)

SPIDER-MAN 3

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 4. (In wide release.)

THE TREATMENT

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 4. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinema.)

WAITRESS

The last movie directed by the late Adrienne Shelly, about a pregnant waitress looking for a way out of her loveless marriage. Starring Keri Russell; Shelly co-stars. Opening May 2. (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

NOW PLAYING

DISTURBIA

Judged as an adolescent, suburban version of Hitchcock's extraordinarily sophisticated 1954 urban thriller "Rear Window," this movie, written by Christopher B. Landon and Carl Ellsworth and directed by D. J. Caruso, can rightly be called a travesty. The dopiness of it, however, may be an indication not so much of cinematic ineptitude as of the changes in a movie culture that was once devoted to adults and is now rather haplessly and redundantly devoted to kids. Shia LaBeouf, Sarah Roemer, and Aaron Yoo, aided by enough electronic equipment to open a Circuit City, spy on a suspected murderer (David Morse) living across the street. When he gets wise to them, the picture turns into a conventional (and at times effectively scary) horror movie, with splattered blood and corpses floating in some sort of basement vat.—David Denby (In wide release.)

FORTY GUNS

In 1881, Griff Bonnell (Barry Sullivan), a federal marshal, comes to Arizona's Cochise County with his two brothers to serve a warrant on one of the twenty gunslingers in the service of the imperious rancher Jessica Drummond (Barbara Stanwyck), locally sung as "a high-riding woman with a whip." The writer-director Samuel Fuller's hardboiled 1957 Western offers the anticipated measures of doomed love and sudden death but surprises with its dramatic richness. Fuller's aphoristic script sketches a plethora of characters in deep perspective, and his brash, low-budget methods prompt him to cram vast swaths of action into long, relentless tracking shots. The saga of two lonely fighters trapped in the tragedy of family ties and struggling to age with dignity slides over into politics and history: in Fuller's progressive view, the closing frontier made the hired gun obsolete. Despite the bursts of violence that Fuller renders poetic with his signature shock images, his hero knows that the land will soon belong to the sedate townsfolk on whose behalf he honorably plies his loathsome trade.—Richard Brody (BAM; May 4.)

GRINDHOUSE

A mixture of pop academicism and eternal-adolescent exuberance, this three-hour Quentin Tarantino-Robert Rodriguez tribute to the exploitation movies of the seventies includes two new junk features and such divertissements as trailers for imaginary pictures ("Werewolf Women of the S.S."), ads for nauseating food at local restaurants, and deep scratches on the film, as lovingly inscribed as the speckled antiquing on a blanket chest. In the Rodriguez feature, "Planet Terror," a dawn-of-the-dead fantasia, flesh melts, bodies explode like liquid packages squeezed too hard, testicles roll about on the ground. Some of this is fitfully amusing, but a loving re-creation of something tawdry is not all that different from the original. Even a postmodernist bloodbath is wet, sticky, and red. Tarantino's feature, "Death Proof," presents two lovable groups of women, the second of which takes on a mad stunt driver (Kurt Russell) in one of the most impressive car battles in movie history. Tarantino has his triumph, but he's caught in the contradictions of making an *hommage à schlock*—he can't decide whether to be a humanist or a nihilist, so he opportunistically becomes both. The directors did their own cinematography.—D.D. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/16/07.) (In wide release.)

THE HOAX

The barely believable tale of Clifford Irving. He was the joker who, in 1971, declared that he had been contacted by Howard Hughes, who needed a writer to help him with his memoirs. This was utterly un-

VIK MUNIZ

true, but it didn't stop Irving (Richard Gere) and his corpulent, fretful sidekick, Dick Suskind (Alfred Molina), from extracting an advance of half a million dollars from a New York publisher, with the promise of more to come. The first half of Lasse Hallström's film, written by William Wheeler, zips through these frauds and grand delusions with glee; Hallström seems happier in such slippery company than he did with the sluggishness of "Chocolat" or "The Shipping News." The movie treads more heavily as the story proceeds, as the real Hughes intervenes and Irving apparently starts to lose his mind; yet the result, performed with gusto across the board, still makes a rich addition to the cinema of suckerdom. With Hope Davis and Stanley Tucci in fine fettle as the publishers who fall into the trap.—*Anthony Lane* (4/9/07) (In wide release.)

HOT FUZZ

A worthy successor to "Shaun of the Dead," though not a sequel. That dealt with zombies in London; this, even more forbiddingly, deals with the British rural classes, hellbent on preserving their way of life. Simon Pegg (who co-wrote the script) stars as Nicholas Angel, an ambitious policeman consigned, for his own good, to a blameless country town, where he pairs up with an overweight local officer, Danny Butterman (Nick Frost), to chase shoplifters and swans. Needless to say, there are darker crimes to come, and the partners are finally drawn into deafening shoot-outs and high-speed chases—all the paraphernalia of the American cop movies to which Danny is so devoted. Edgar Wright's movie, generous with its gags, doesn't so much spoof the action-thriller genre as pay it prolonged homage, in the most inappropriate of settings; along the way, it finds time to anatomize, as did "Shaun of the Dead," the peculiar lusts and lunacies of modern England—or, at least, that part of it which tries to wish modernity away. With a strong supporting cast, including Jim Broadbent, Timothy Dalton, Billie Whitelaw, and Edward Woodward.—*A.L.* (4/30/07) (In wide release.)

LONELY HEARTS

An explicit but sombre version of the sanguinary adventures of the real-life lovers Raymond Fernandez (Jared Leto) and Martha Beck (Salma Hayek), who in the late nineteen-forties ensnared lonely women (Ray, in thick toupee, was the fantasy Latin lover, and Martha his "sister"), fleeced them, and then killed them. The writer-director Todd Robinson is the grandson of the Long Island homicide detective Elmer Robinson (John Travolta), who, along with his loquacious partner, Charles Hildebrandt (James Gandolfini), led the investigation that eventually brought the pair down. Robinson splits the narrative between the cops and the killers; he wants us to understand what this kind of work takes out of the police, especially out of the taciturn Elmer, who was saddened and demoralized by the earlier suicide of his wife and who longs to find some meaning in his work. As the cheesy little stud, Leto is amazing, and when he takes off the toupee he's just an ordinary chain-smoking, henpecked-husband type. Salma Hayek is not much of an actress, but she encases Martha in pathological rage. The movie has a touching but finally wan desire for order and domestic peace.—*D.D.* (4/23/07) (In wide release.)

PARIS, JE T'AIME

This mixed bag of eighteen very short films about Paris by twenty-one directors is mandatory viewing for its one absolute masterpiece, by Alexander Payne, in which an ungainly, lonesome Denver mail carrier recalls her trip to the city in a broken French voice-over. Some of the biggest names in the batch—including the Coen brothers, Gus Van Sant, and Wes Craven—just tread water, but Gérard Depardieu and Frédéric Auburtin offer a deeply moving scene, scripted by Gena Rowlands (channelling John Casavetes), featuring Rowlands and Ben Gazzara as an elderly couple postmorteming their dead marriage. In Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas's politically insightful if schematic sketch, a Brazilian immigrant parks her baby in a depressing crèche en route to her job as a nanny. Alfonso Cuarón's clever O. Henry-ish entry features Nick Nolte and Ludivine Sagnier in a single long take, and Olivier Assayas's mini-drama, with Maggie Gyllenhaal as an American actress who grows attached to her coke

dealer, has a poignant clincher. Several directors weigh in, if wanly, on a multiethnic society, but few delight in the city's physical or historical particulars: has Paris become just another metropolis? In French and English.—*R.B.* (Paris and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE PELICAN

Paul Boyer (Gérard Blain), a jazz pianist in Paris, has lots of free time during the day, and spends it happily with his baby boy, Marc. But money is tight, and so, at his wife's prompting, Paul takes a chance on running counterfeit dollars to New York for a big payoff. Caught at customs, he spends nine years in an American jail and returns home to find her remarried to a wealthy man and his own paternal rights revoked. The rest of the film—directed by Blain with the harrowing calm of an intimate confession—follows Paul in his obsessive, desperate, coldly calculated effort to see his son again. Though the story is part thriller, part family melodrama, part spiritual journey, part social drama, Blain purges it of all genre artifice: the purity of his method and his sentiments suggests the fresh, primal artistry of the early silent cinema. Released in 1973. In French.—*R.B.* (Tribeca Film Festival; May 4-5.)

RED ROAD

Andrea Arnold wrote and directed this spare Scottish thriller, in which Jackie (Kate Dickie) leads a glum existence as a security guard who spends most of her time monitoring a bleak patch of Glasgow slum land on a multitude of TV screens. When she recognizes Clyde (the convincingly dangerous Tony Curran) lumbering about in a menacing fashion, she is impelled to follow him despite her evident fear. What starts out as a gratuitous, screenwriterly conceit—the omniscient guardian of society who has no control over her own life—ends up being surprisingly gratifying, as Arnold skillfully escalates the tension and Jackie and Clyde grapple with their tragic lots in life.—*Shauna Lyon* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

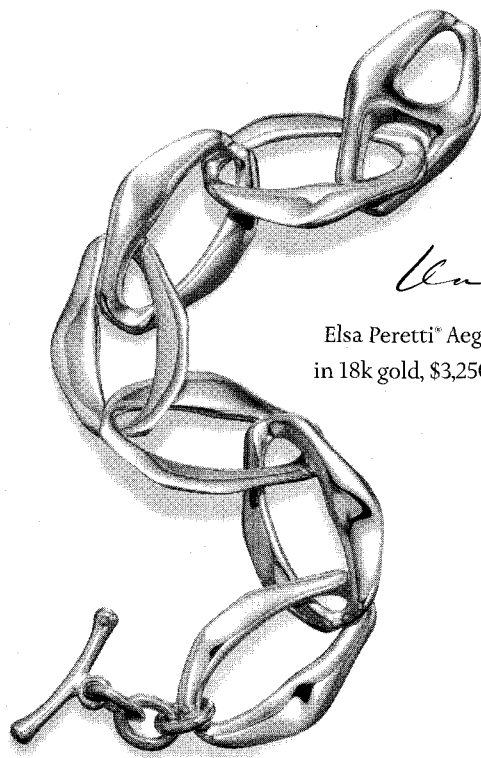
THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD

In its own subdued fashion, Martin Ritt's version of John le Carré's first great best-seller packs a wallop. Three of its key talents—Richard Burton, Claire Bloom, and the cinematographer Oswald Morris—previously worked together on the initial *Angry Young Man* movie, "Look Back in Anger"; this is an *Angry Middle-Aged Spy* movie. As the British agent Alec Leamas, Burton manages to make self-loathing and bitterness intriguing; he uses his stout body and bagged eyes to create a multihued miasma. He's matched by Cyril Cusack (as Leamas's boss, Control), who gives meaning to every intake of air and sip of tea; by Oskar Werner, who brings refreshing jauntiness to the role of an East German Jewish intelligence officer; and by Bloom, who exudes both naïveté and sensuality as Leamas's Communist lover. With the help of Morris's black-and-white camerawork, Ritt creates an atmosphere of melancholy duplicity that infiltrates a viewer's brain and bones.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; May 7.)

SYNDROMES AND A CENTURY

The American-educated Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul finds much grace in a simple premise: he sets out to depict the lives of his mother and father before they met. In the film's first part, Weerasethakul shows the pretty, light-hearted Dr. Toey (Nantarat Sawaddikul), a rural doctor with two suitors, and, in the second half, Dr. Nohng (Jaruchai Iamaram), a disturbed hematologist, who deals with incurable diseases in a modern military hospital. The cinematography of the first part is stunningly beautiful, conveying the languor of country existence with a rare patience, and lending itself to the oblique storytelling. However, superfluous symbolism—lots of circles, and statues of the long-dead—feels clumsily overt, and interrupts the flow of an otherwise lovely narrative. The cycle-of-life theme is realized more effectively in a dialogue between a young monk and a dentist who share a love of music. In Thai.—*S.L.* (IFC Center.)

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THE TV SET

"Truthfully, 'original' scares me a little," says Lenny (Sigourney Weaver), the TV network head in Jake Kasdan's sharp satirical comedy about the difficulties of getting a series off the ground. Lenny is the chief nemesis of Kasdan's hard-pressed hero, the writer-producer Mike Klein (David Duchovny), whose somewhat daring idea for a show gets squeezed by Lenny into a piece of conventional whimsy. Kasdan is shrewd and funny about such things as the intricate protocol on the set and the diverse ways that powerful people feign sincerity. The satire is unrelenting but not too broad; it stays close to common observation. Kasdan's special target: the astonishing Hollywood habit of presenting even the most negative opinions of a writer's or actor's work in initial upbeat panegyrics ("We loved it! Loved it!"), followed by the inevitable kicker, "But we have some concerns," which, it turns out, completely undermines whatever it was that the writer or actor was trying to do.—D.D. (4/16/07) (In wide release.)

VACANCY

Lost on a dark night, a divorcing couple (Kate Beckinsale and Luke Wilson) stop at a nearly vacant motel with few amenities, no phone service, and, of course, a beyond-creepy night manager (Frank Whaley). When they find a videotape of a brutal killing that was filmed in the same room that they are staying in, the horrors begin. This gleefully familiar setup is given an effective, almost theatrical presentation by the director Nimród Antal (his previous film was the excellent Hungarian thriller "Kontroll"), who is an expert at slowly structuring the gathering dread. Beckinsale and Wilson are well matched, yelling and screaming their way through the proceedings as

Antal provides the necessary thrills for this compact, anything-but-tidy shocker.—Bruce Diones (In wide release.)

THE VALET

Another busy French farce from Francis Veber, the director of "The Dinner Game." Gad Elmaleh plays François Pignon, a humble parker of cars, who by sheer mischance—Veber's specialty—ends up posing as the temporary lover of a supermodel (Alice Taglioni). Caught up in the whirl of circumstance are a number of other fools and avengers, including a bewildered billionaire (Daniel Auteuil) and his needle-sharp wife (Kristin Scott Thomas). As ever, Veber piles on the obstacles, but the movie feels unresolved, and it lacks the misanthropic verve of his earlier work; it almost seems to be priming itself for a softhearted Hollywood remake. With Michel Aumont as a hypochondriac doctor. In French.—A.L. (4/30/07) (Angelika Film Center and Cinema 1, 2, and 3.)

YEAR OF THE DOG

Pencil, a lovely little beagle living in Los Angeles, dies when he eats something he shouldn't have, and his owner, Peggy (Molly Shannon), grief-struck, screws up at her job, brings home vicious and abandoned pooches, takes up the cause of animal activism, tries to get everyone in her life to adopt a pet, and, in general, withdraws from people and from the world. This first movie directed by Mike White, who wrote "The Good Girl" and "School of Rock," is devoted to the fixations not only of dog lovers but of corporate executives, man-obsessed friends, and parents. White poses his monomaniacs front and center with a lot of space around them and lets the actors (including Laura Dern and Peter Sarsgaard) speak their semi-satirical lines without interruption. He's trying for an effect of deadpan portraiture, and some of his writ-

ing has a surprising kick—a few words at the end of a seemingly conventional line that reveal the speaker's sweetly neurotic soul. Still, most of the movie is hard to sit through. Molly Shannon, of "Saturday Night Live," doesn't have much range or depth, and White's sensitivity becomes cloying. The meaning of the movie is: we're all creeps, so just accept your inner cripple and live with it—celebrate it, even.—D.D. (4/23/07) (In wide release.)

ZOO

In the state of Washington in 2005, a man died of a perforated colon after having sexual relations with a horse. Robinson Devor's impressionistic reconstruction of the events surrounding that incident is profoundly compassionate yet oddly frustrating. Using audio interviews with members of the zoophile community who gathered there due to the state's lack, at the time, of laws against bestiality, Devor and the co-writer, Charles Mudede, restage with actors (as well as an acquaintance of the deceased who was willing to appear on camera) things as they seemed to the participants, not a full view of things as they were. The vague and tendentious method parses the story in terms of pleasure-seekers victimized by the forces of repression, yet when one zoophile equates his love for horses to other men's love for their wives and children, questions of morality and perspective arise which Devor scrupulously avoids. He conveys his awe of the mystery and the tyranny of desire, but in his empathetic effort to normalize it, he flattens and sentimentalizes the story.—R.B. (IFC Center.)

Also Playing

FRACTURE: In wide release. **IN THE LAND OF WOMEN:** In wide release. **JINDABYNE:** In wide release. **NEXT:** In wide release. **STEPHANIE DALEY:** Angelika Film Center. **TRIAD ELECTION:** Film Forum.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. May 2-3 at 7 and 9: "The Short Life of José Antonio Gutierrez" (2006, Heidi Specogna). ♦ "Essential Cinema." May 3 at 8: "Film Portrait" (1971, Jerome Hill). ♦ May 4 at 8: "Un Chant d'Amour" (1950, Jean Genet; silent), "Pull My Daisy" (1959, Robert Frank and Albert Leslie), and "Blonde Cobra" (1959/63, Ken Jacobs and Bob Fleischner). ♦ The Films of Emile de Antonio. May 4 at 7: "In the Year of the Pig" (1968). ♦ May 4 at 9:15: "Rush to Judgment" (1966). ♦ May 5 at 5 and May 8 at 7: "America Is Hard to See" (1970). ♦ May 5 at 7 and May 7 at 9: "Millhouse: A White Comedy" (1971). ♦ May 5 and May 8 at 9: "Painters Painting" (1972). ♦ May 6 at 5: "Underground" (1976). ♦ May 6 at 7: "Charge and Counter-Charge" (1968). ♦ May 6 at 9:30: "In the King of Prussia" (1982). ♦ May 7 at 7: "Mr. Hoover and I" (1982). ♦ Special screenings. May 5-6 at 6 and 8: "Imagine the Sound" (1981/2007, Ron Mann).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Barbara Stanwyck. May 2 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "The Bitter Tea of General Yen" (1933, Frank Capra). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a discussion with the critic Elliott Stein and Victoria Wilson, the author of a biography of Stanwyck. ♦ May 3 at 7 and 9:30: "Meet John Doe" (1941, Frank Capra). ♦ May 4 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Forty Guns" (†). ♦ May 5 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Double Indemnity" (1944, Billy Wilder). ♦ May 6 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Night Walker" (1964, William Castle). ♦ Special screening. May 8 at 7: "Wild at Heart" (1990, David Lynch), followed by a Q. & A. with the writer Barry Gifford.

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. May 2-8 at 1, 3:15, 5:40, 7:50, and 10: "The Earrings of Madame de . . ." (1953, Max Ophüls; in French). ♦ Through May 17: "Vintage 007 and '60s Spies A-Go-Go." May 2 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Spy Who Loved Me" (1977, Lewis



Mickalene Thomas's "Special Occasion (Lovely Six Foota)," at Golden, in Chelsea.

Gilbert). ♦ May 3 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:30: "The Silencers" (1966, Phil Karlson). ♦ May 3 at 3:30 and 7:30: "Our Man Flint" (1966, Daniel Mann). ♦ May 4-5 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "From Russia with Love" (1963, Terence Young). The 7 and 9:30 shows will be followed by a sing-along. ♦ May 6 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Diamonds Are Forever" (1971, Guy Hamilton). ♦ May 7 at 1:25, 5:35, and 9:45: "Our Man in Havana" (1959, Carol Reed). ♦ May 7 at 3:30 and 7:40: "The Spy Who Came In from the Cold" (†). ♦ May 8 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Octopussy" (1983, John Glen).

"Ragin" (2005, Kirill Serebrennikov; in Russian and German). ♦ May 5-6 at 5: "Monkeys in Winter" (2006, Milena Andonova; in Bulgarian).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—The films of William S. Hart. May 5 at 5: "The Whistle" (1921, Lambert Hillyer; silent), introduced by the curator Richard Koszarski. ♦ May 6 at 4: "Tumbleweeds" (1925, King Baggot). ♦ Special screenings. May 5 at 6:30: "The Optimists" (2006, Goran Paskaljević; in Serbian). ♦ May 6 at 2: "Kill Bill: Vol. 2" (2004, Quentin Tarantino).



POP NOTES MADE IN THE SHADES

When Ian Hunter led Mott the Hoople, he and his band delivered a series of albums that raised the bar for noisy, heartfelt rock and roll; they sounded like the world's loudest Rolling Stones cover band trying to play Bob Dylan's "Blonde on Blonde" and failing so brilliantly that their chaos became a new order. For years, Mott was the best band to never quite make it; even when they did make it, with "All the Young Dudes," they still inspired the kind of affection usually reserved for beloved cult acts. Hunter's solo career, erratic but always worthy, has followed suit. "Rant," from 2001, had strong songs and confident, rootsy music, and it was a high-water mark. "Shrunken Heads" (Yep Roc), his new album, may be even better.

It is no secret that dozens if not hundreds of rock stars venerate Mott and Hunter. David Bowie, who gave them "All the Young Dudes," was a fan. Mick Jones, of the Clash, co-produced one of Hunter's solo records. Here, the guest star is Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, who sings on a trio of songs. The album opener, "Words (Big Mouth)," is one of them, and the song's title is the only awkward thing about it. Over a loping

acoustic guitar, Hunter apologizes to his wife for saying something he shouldn't have. The lyrics don't rhyme, and Hunter is verbally immoderate even while lamenting his own verbal outbursts; words are "little beads of poison," "cruel little clusters," and "grammatical bacteria." But the main draw is Hunter's vocals, which combine world-weariness, wisdom, and honesty in a way that few rock singers' can.

The rest of the album operates at a similar altitude. "Rant" covered familiar ground thematically, touching on Hunter's love for rock and roll and his ambivalence about England and America. "Shrunken Heads" is more overtly political in spots. There's the Katrina broadside "How's Your House?" and the title track, which seems to be about the American government's management of the Iraq war. But if all politics is personal, so, finally, are all Ian Hunter records. "Shrunken Heads" closes with two excellent bits of proof: the jaunty and self-explanatory "I Am What I Hated When I Was Young" and the lost-love lament "Read 'Em and Weep."

—Ben Greenman

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Fanny Ardant. May 8 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Eight Women" (2002, François Ozon; in French and English).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. May 4-6 at noon: "Murmur of the Heart" (1971, Louis Malle; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." May 4-5: "El Topo" (1970, Alejandro Jodorowsky; in Spanish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"New Acquisitions: Robert Altman." May 2 at 5:30 and May 3 at 8:15: "Gosford Park" (2001). ♦ May 2 at 8:30 and May 3 at 6: "A Prairie Home Companion" (2006). ♦ "Filmmakers at MacDowell." May 2 at 7: "Seasons of MacDowell" (2007, Michael Almereyda, George Griffin, David Petersen, and Elisabeth Subrin), introduced by Robert MacNeil, chairman of the MacDowell Colony, and the filmmakers. ♦ May 3 at 8 and May 5 at 6:30: "Hamlet" (2000, Almereyda). ♦ May 4 at 8: "Letters Not About Love" (1998, Jacki Ochs). ♦ May 5 at 2: "Maria Full of Grace" (2004, Joshua Marston). ♦ May 5 at 4:30: Short-film program, including "Playing the Part" (1995, Mitch McCabe). ♦ May 6 at 2:30: "Rain in a Dry Land" (2006, Anne Makepeace) and "Yoohoo, Mrs. Goldberg" (a work in progress by Aviva Kempner). ♦ May 6 at 5: "Decasia" (2002, Bill Morrison). ♦ Films from the Karlovy Vary Festival. May 4 at 6, May 5 at 7:30, and May 7 at 8: "My Nikifor" (2004, Krzysztof Krauze; in Polish). ♦ May 4 at 8:30 and May 6 at 2: "Other Worlds" (2006, Marko Škop; in Slovakian). ♦ May 5 at 2 and May 7 at 6:

PIONEER THEATRE

155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. May 2 and May 4-8 at 9 and May 3 at 4: "Missing Victor Pellerin" (2006, Sophie Deraspe; in French).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." May 4 at 9:30: "Lessons of Darkness" (1992, Werner Herzog), introduced by Richard Hankin.

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." May 4-5: "Vanishing Point" (1971, Richard Sarafian).

TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL

Screenings are held at locations throughout New York; for more program information and complete schedule, call 866-941-3378 or visit www.tribecafilmfestival.org. May 2 at 7, May 4 at 7:30, and May 5 at 8:30: "Still Life" (2006, Jia Zhangke; in Mandarin). ♦ May 2 at 7:30, May 3 at 3, and May 4 at 9:30: "The Optimists" (2006, Goran Paskaljević; in Serbian). ♦ May 2 at 8 and May 5 at 5: "The King of Kong" (2006, Seth Gordon). ♦ May 2 at 10:30 and May 5 at 10:15 A.M.: "Two in One" (2006, Kira Muratova; in Russian). ♦ May 2 at 11 and May 6 at 7: "A Walk into the Sea: Danny Williams and the Warhol Factory" (2006, Esther B. Robinson). ♦ May 3 at 5, May 4 at 8:30, May 5 at 11:30, and May 6 at 11 A.M.: "The Devil Came on Horseback" (2006, Annie Sundberg and Ricki Stern). ♦ May 3 at 10:45: "The Polymath, or the Life and Opinions of Samuel R. Delany, Gentleman" (2007, Fred Barney Taylor). ♦ May 4 at 11 A.M.: "Half Moon" (2006, Bahman Ghobadi; in Kurdish and Farsi). ♦ May 4 at 11 A.M. and May 5 at 7: "Making Of" (2006, Nouri Bouzid; in Arabic). ♦ May 4 at 1:45 and May 5 at 5:15: "The Pelican" (†). ♦ May 5 at 1:30: "Night of the Hunchback" (1963,

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Video: A clip from
"Away from Her,"
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Farrokh Gaffary; in Farsi). ♦ May 5 at 8: "The Premonition" (2006, Jean-Pierre Darroussin; in French).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—The films of Carlos Saura. All films are in Spanish. May 2 at noon: "Blood Wedding" (1981). ♦ May 2 at 1:30: "Carmen" (1983). ♦ May 2 at 3:30: "Love the Magician" (1986). ♦ Through May 10: The films of Paul Mazursky. May 4 at 1:30 and May 7 at 6:15: "Tempest" (1982). ♦ May 4 at 4:15 and May 5 at 9:15: "I Love You, Alice B. Toklas" (1963, Hy Averback). ♦ May 4 at 6:15 and May 5 at 1:45: "Next Stop, Greenwich Village" (1976). ♦ May 4 at 9:15 and May 5 at 4: "Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice" (1969). ♦ May 5 at 6:30 and May 6 at 3:30: "An Unmarried Woman" (1978). ♦ May 6 at 1: "Yippee: A Journey to Jewish Joy" (2006). ♦ May 6 at 6 and May 7 at 3:30: "Blume in Love" (1973). ♦ May 6 at 8:30: "Enemies: A Love Story" (1989). ♦ May 7 at 1 and 9: "Moscow on the Hudson" (1984).

READINGS AND TALKS

"READINGS ON THE FOURTH FLOOR"

John Hodgman, David Rakoff, and Sarah Vowell read from their work and then talk with Elissa Schappell. (P.S. 107, 1301 Eighth Ave., between 13th and 14th Sts., Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-330-9340. May 2 at 7:30.)

STEGNER CIRCLE SERIES

The spring installment of this biannual reading series, which is put on by the Trust for Public Land and which takes its name from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author and environmentalist, features a talk by Lynden B. Miller, the director of

the Conservatory Garden in Central Park and a longtime shepherd of New York City's open spaces. (Scandinavia House, Park Ave. at 38th St. For more information, call 212-677-7171, ext. 223. May 2 at 7.)

PUBLIC ART FUND TALKS

The artist Lisa Yuskavage discusses her paintings. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 212-980-3942. May 3 at 6:30.)

"SUNDAYS AT SUNNY'S"

The novelists Gabriel Cohen and Sarah Good-year join the memoirist Peter Godwin for an afternoon reading in Brooklyn. (253 Conover St., Red Hook. May 6 at 3. For more information, call Book Court, at 718-875-3677.)

DIA: CHELSEA

The photographer Vera Lutter discusses the paintings of Gerhard Richter. (548 W. 22nd St. 212-989-5566. May 7 at 6:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"THE POETICS OF WALKING"

Poets House examines the flâneur tradition with a panel discussion on May 4 at 7, featuring Brenda Coultas, Lytle Shaw, and others familiar with the wanderers and writings of Baudelaire, Whitman, O'Hara, and the like. The following day, starting at 11 A.M., the same experts put their knowledge to practical use with guided tours of the Bowery, Central Park, and other neighborhoods in Manhattan. (72 Spring St., 2nd fl. 212-431-7920.)

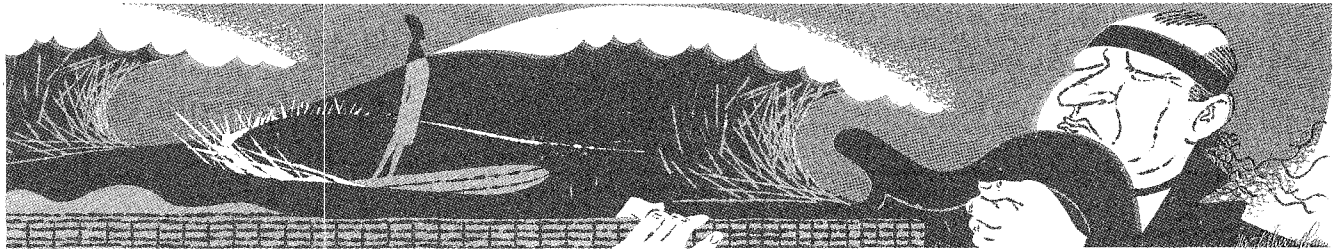
MORE PERAMBULATION

The nonprofit volunteer group Shorewalkers embarks on its annual "Great Saunter," a thirty-two-

mile walk around Manhattan's perimeter. (May 5, starting at 7:30 A.M. For more information, visit www.shorewalkers.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Next week, the big Impressionist-modern sales will blow into town, so the auction houses are keeping things relatively low-key for now with sales of prints. Which isn't to say that there aren't some great pieces to be had, such as "Cake-Walk," a vibrantly colored Expressionist lithograph by Kirchner (from his Dresden period) at Sotheby's sale (May 3-4); the auction opens with an extensive assortment of Whistler prints from the collection of Dr. George S. van Houten. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Swann's auction of prints (May 3) is led by a hundred works by Old Masters, including several by Dürer (two of which were formerly in the collection of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts) and Rembrandt; a sale of modernist posters (May 7), one of the house's specialties, features publicity images for Peugeot, the Étoile du Nord rail line, and Radiola. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ Doyle presents two sales, one of books and movie memorabilia and the other of prints—including Magritte's enigmatic etching of a disconnected face, "Paysage de Baucis"—on May 2. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.) ♦ In addition to twenty-dollar orchestra seats and simulcasts in movie theatres, general manager Peter Gelb's clever ideas for the Metropolitan Opera include an art auction to raise funds for the staging of new productions (May 6). All of the art is contemporary and inspired by opera, including a collage by Richard Prince based on "Madama Butterfly" and an angelic video portrait of Renée Fleming (as Thaïs) by Robert Wilson. As a treat, the tenor Salvatore Licitra and the mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato will sing before the bidding begins. (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-870-7441.)



ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES LEEWAY

May 11-24

No actor was ever as good at being bad as Lee Marvin. His name in the credits of a movie guaranteed snarling violence put over with warped humor and sinister glee. Walter Reade Theatre devotes two weeks to his films, including such masterworks as "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," "The Killers," "The Big Heat," and "Seven Men from Now." And in the musical Western "Paint Your Wagon" he sings. (212-875-5600.)

DANCE SIGN LANGUAGE

May 16-20

The choreographer Doug Varone brings "Dense Terrain," a new evening-length work about the urge to communicate, to BAM's Harvey Theatre. The film composer Nathan Larson provides the cinematic score. (718-636-4100.)

ART THE LONG VIEW

May 16-June 24

The National Academy held its first Annual Exhibition in 1826—fifty years before the Metropolitan Museum

opened, at a time when there were few venues in the city for artists to show their work. The Academy's hundred-and-eighty-second Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art includes work by some two hundred artists. (212-369-4880.)

READINGS AND TALKS LIFE UNDERGROUND

May 22

In his travels through caves in Thailand, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere over the past decade, the evolutionary biologist Luis Espinasa has discovered a variety of hitherto unknown creatures. He discusses his adventures and his

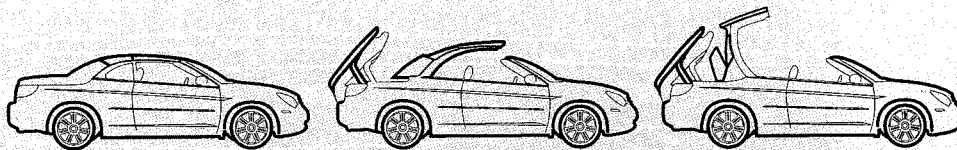
findings at the Explorers Club. (212-628-8383.)

NIGHT LIFE HANGING TEN

May 27

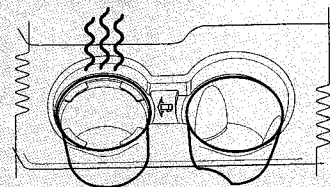
Memorial Day weekend marks the start of the summer season. What better way (for those who choose to remain in town, anyway) to celebrate than with the iconic surf-rock sounds of the guitarist Dick Dale, the grandfather of the genre, who will be at the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill that Sunday night. (212-997-4144.)

The guitarist Dick Dale at B. B. King Blues Club.



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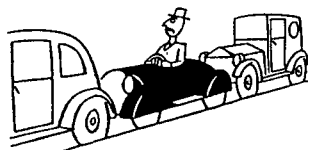
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT DON'T DRIVE, HE SAID



Michael Bloomberg has always favored grand schemes. Last week, on Earth Day, the Mayor stood in the American Museum of Natural History's Hall of Ocean Life, beneath the blue whale, to lay out his vision for the city's future. In an expansive speech, Bloomberg described a New York that would, in 2030, be both "greater" and "greener," a city with nearly a million more residents, as well as cleaner water, new open space, and zippier transportation. This bigger, better metropolis would be a leader in combatting global warming; despite its increased population, the New York of the future would produce thirty per cent less CO₂, resulting, as the Mayor put it, in "the most dramatic reduction in greenhouse gases ever achieved by any American city."

The printed version of Bloomberg's plan ran to a hundred and fifty-five full-color pages and contained a hundred and twenty-seven new initiatives. Just one of them—congestion pricing—got almost all the attention, much of it negative. The Mayor anticipated this—he referred to the pricing proposal as "the elephant in the room"—and his decision to include it anyway is perhaps the best reason to take the plan seriously.

The basic idea behind congestion pricing is simple: make motorists pay to use the busiest streets. Under the Mayor's proposal, an invisible line would be drawn around Manhattan from Eighty-sixth Street south to the Battery. Vehicles crossing this line on weekdays between 6 A.M. and 6 P.M. would be charged a fee—eight dollars for cars, twenty-one dollars for trucks. (Those travelling only within the congestion zone would pay half price, while taxis and livery cabs would be exempt.) The fees would be assessed electronically and could be paid

either with a toll pass or over the phone or the Internet.

Driving crosstown for lunch is an easy, if maddening, way to appreciate the scheme's logic. The impression that one could walk—or at least trot—just as quickly is borne out by the numbers; according to data collected by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council and analyzed by Bruce Schaller, a Brooklyn-based consultant, the average speed achieved by a vehicle travelling along Forty-second Street between the hours of 10 A.M. and 4 P.M. is 4.7 miles per hour. On Thirty-fourth Street approaching the entrance to the Queens Midtown Tunnel, the average speed drops to 2.5 miles per hour.

A few cities have tried congestion pricing, most notably Stockholm and London, and in most cases it has been a success. Stockholm imposed congestion pricing on a trial basis last year; the program worked so well that voters opted to reinstitute it. Since the London plan was introduced, in 2003, vehicle speeds in the city's central business district have increased by thirty-seven per cent and carbon-dioxide emissions from cars and trucks have dropped by fifteen per cent. The plan, which the newspapers initially derided as "Kengestion"—after its main supporter, London's mayor, Ken Livingstone—has grown increasingly popular; in 2004, Livingstone was easily reelected, and now nearly two-thirds of Londoners say that they back the scheme. Just three months ago, the congestion zone was expanded westward to include most of the





"Great—their Santa Fe style has leaked into the hallway."

boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster.

The case against congestion pricing is often posed in egalitarian terms. "The middle class and the poor will not be able to pay these fees and the rich will," State Assemblyman Richard Brodsky, of Westchester County, declared after listening to the Mayor's speech. In fact, the poor don't, as a rule, drive in and out of Manhattan: compare the cost of buying, insuring, and parking a car with the seventy-six dollars a month the M.T.A. charges for an unlimited-ride MetroCard. For those who do use cars to commute, eight dollars a day would, it's true, quickly add up. And that is precisely the point. Congestion pricing works only to the extent that it makes other choices—changing the hours of one's daily drive or, better yet, using mass transit—more attractive. One of the Mayor's proposals is to put the money raised by congestion pricing—an estimated four hundred million dollars a year—toward improving subway and bus service.

Meanwhile, it's naïve to suppose that congestion isn't itself costly. Sitting in traffic, a plumber can't plumb and a deliveryman can't deliver. The value of time lost to congestion delays in the city has been put at five billion dollars annually. When expenses like wasted fuel, lost revenue, and the increased cost of doing

business are added in, that figure rises to thirteen billion dollars. The question, Bloomberg observed, is "not whether we want to pay but how do we want to pay?"

Many elements of the Mayor's plan, including congestion pricing, will require approval by the state legislature, which is too bad, since, as a recent *Times* editorial put it, Albany is a place where good policies generally "go to die." Even Governor Eliot Spitzer, who, as state attorney general, sued the country's largest carbon emitters, offered what can only be described as a tepid endorsement of the Mayor's proposal, saying, "We look forward to reviewing the plan."

As a matter of city planning, congestion pricing is a compelling idea; in the context of climate change, it is much more than that. Any meaningful effort to address the problem will have to include incentives for low-emitting activities (walking, biking, riding the subway) and costs for high-emitting ones (flying, driving, sitting at home and cranking up the A.C.). These costs will inconvenience some people—perhaps most people—and the burden will not always be distributed with perfect fairness. But, as the Mayor pointed out, New York, a flood-prone coastal city, is vulnerable to one of global warming's most destructive—and most certain—consequences: rising sea

levels. If New Yorkers won't change their behavior, then it's hard to see why anyone in the rest of the country or, for that matter, the world should, either. The congestion problem will, in that case, find a different resolution. Who, after all, wants to drive into a city that's under water?

—Elizabeth Kolbert

THE PICTURES ICON



Columbia Road, in the East End of London, is thronged on weekends. Every Sunday, it blooms into a flower market. Visit on a weekday, however, when the street is noiseless and half the shops are shut, and you may think you have strayed onto a film set. So it felt appropriate to see Julie Christie arrive on Columbia Road one recent Friday. Her limousine of choice was an old bicycle with a wicker basket, and her entrance, through the doors of the Royal Oak pub, could not have been less grand. Of the two solitary drinkers who sat there, only one looked up.

Here was a woman to whose tune, in the nineteen-sixties, all of London swung. Historians of the period are advised to read her body language in "Darling" as a guide to the emergence of the gadabout. Christie still keeps a place in the city, although she recently spent five years in California, where her partner, the journalist Duncan Campbell, was posted as a correspondent for the *Guardian*. Like many British actresses, Christie (born in 1940 in India, the daughter of a tea planter) has a touch of the peregrine spirit—"I'm not sure I really come from anywhere," she said. She owns a house in Wales, and taught herself Welsh after joining a campaign there against the dumping of nuclear waste. The protest worked. "They don't bury it in the mountains anymore," she said. Who could say no to Julie Christie?

The compound is unmistakable: shyness and spotless manners—maximum radiance meets minimum vanity—plus the trenchant political urge to

“Recall how hard it was
last year to find a perfect
present for Mother’s Day
that wasn’t one more
box of chocolates?
Remember this book.
You’ll thank me. It’s perfect.”

—Lionel Shriver, *The Guardian*, UK

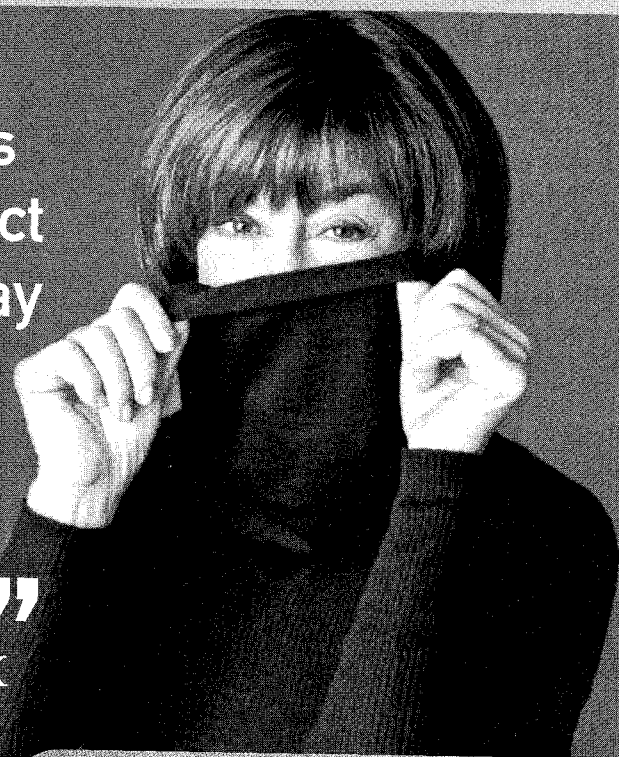


Photo © Elena Salbert

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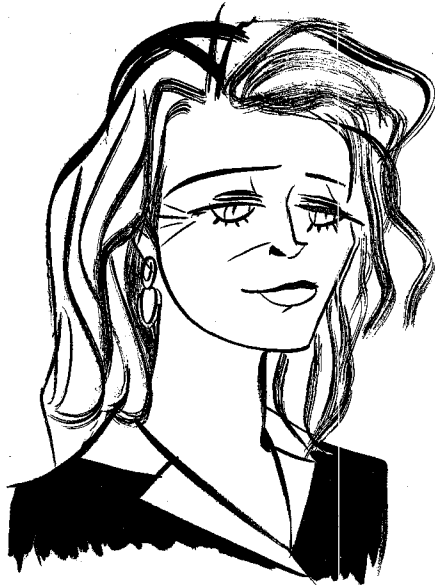
Ephron on what she
wishes she’d known:

Never marry a man you wouldn’t want to be divorced from ★ Don’t cover a couch with anything that isn’t more or less beige ★ The last four years of psychoanalysis are a waste of money ★ When your children are teenagers it’s important to have a dog so someone in the house is happy to see you ★ If you think he’s gay, he’s probably gay ★ You can order more than one dessert!

Ephron on bikinis:

Oh, how I regret not having worn a bikini for the entire year I was 26. If anyone young is reading this, go right this minute, put on a bikini and don’t take it off until you’re 34.

know her own mind and speak it. If you had to name another actor who projects the same two-tone mystery, it would be Warren Beatty; no wonder they were linked for so long. Of her profession, Christie said, "I never know what it is that I'm meant to be doing," sounding like a child in a school play. She then launched into a defense of Moazzam



Julie Christie

Begg, the British Muslim who was detained in Bagram and Guantánamo until 2005, before moving seamlessly into a discussion of the role that she turned down in "American Gigolo." ("I just thought the woman was getting a rotten deal.") Keeping up with Christie—the flow of her eagerness and her indignation—can be hard work, not least because both are voiced in the most serene of tones. If she hadn't been an actress, she would have made an excellent shrink.

All these qualities—the tough, the delicate, the unshockable—are present in her latest film, "Away from Her." Opening this week, the movie is directed by Sarah Polley, who is, according to Christie, "a hundred times more mature than, for instance, me." Playing Fiona, a Canadian woman succumbing to Alzheimer's disease, she proves her ability to portray characters less outspoken than she is. In earlier days, Fiona was betrayed by her husband, but, as Christie says, "she did what many women all over the world did: she kept quiet." For the Fionas of this world, "it's as if the sixties never happened." Set

against that are the startling closeups: Christie's face, with coiling gray hair and undimmed blue eyes, filling the screen. If Penélope Cruz or Jennifer Lopez sees this movie, she may just give up and become a librarian.

Christie works sparingly these days, although she was not so lofty as to refuse a part in "Troy." ("Absolute heaven. I got to do one whole day in a Maltese bay, a *blissful* bay, sitting in one of those director's chairs with Brad Pitt, who is a charming and thoughtful young man. What could be nicer?") The best directors, like Nicolas Roeg and François Truffaut (who claimed that "she hides behind her hair because she's so afraid of being found out"), have always swarmed to her, and there are still some, like Todd Solondz and Pedro Almodóvar, who, to judge by her plaudits, shouldn't hesitate to pick up the phone. She both needs and repays the confidence of filmmakers, from the David Lean who cast her in "Doctor Zhivago" to the Beatty who guided her through "Shampoo"—"I was aware of the fact that I was in safe political hands," she said.

Yet the person who emerged from the Royal Oak was clearly more than able to take care of herself and defend her opinions to the hilt. Told that she should see "The Lives of Others," the award-winning movie about East Germany, Christie paused, then replied, "I'm not sure I can bear to see a film they gave the Oscar to, that tells you what awful people Communists are." And with that she laughed, unlocked her bike, and pedalled off into the sunshine.

—Anthony Lane

FIELD TRIP MASTER'S VOICE



The painter Julian Schnabel is not an early riser, and last Monday morning he was more than usually fatigued, having returned the day before from Paris, where for the past six months he has been making a film of Jean-Dominique Bauby's memoir "The Div-

ing Bell and the Butterfly." Not long after arriving at his Brooklyn studio, at around eleven, he settled into a commodious velvet armchair, with chipped gilt paint on its arms, and fell asleep.

He was dressed in jeans and a checked work shirt that was tight around the middle, and wore a long necklace of bright beads and charms, which was made by his daughter Lola when she was seven. The dimly lit space was bustling with people—assistants, several Schnabel children, and assorted visitors, including Agnes Gund, the former president of the Museum of Modern Art—but nothing appeared to disturb the artist in his Buddha-like repose.

At eleven-thirty, Schnabel got to his feet to greet six art students, who were in town as guests of the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, a program created by Ted Arison, the founder of Carnival Cruise Lines (who died in 1999), and his wife, Lin. The students had been mustered out of the Hilton at nine-fifteen, marched through MOMA, and then taken to Brooklyn in a van for a master class with Schnabel. One of them, eighteen-year-old Cheryl Smith, had the word "Rauschenberg" written on her hand, because she had seen something of his she liked in the museum.

"Hello, I'm Julian," Schnabel said. "I work here."

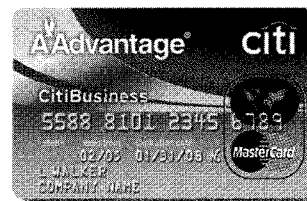
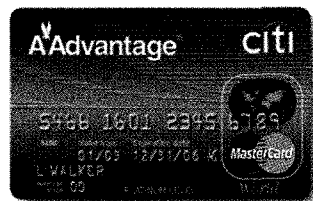
He began by telling the class his areas of expertise: "I know bullfighting, surfing, painting, and art." Schnabel, whose smashed-plate paintings made him a star in the eighties and became a symbol of that decade's bombast, has acquired with the years (he's fifty-five) a tinge of self-mockery that makes his egocentrism more palatable. He showed the students two of his early paintings. They were huge and dirty-looking. "I don't want art to look expensive," he said. "I like it when it looks like junk." He told them a story, now a well-established part of his legend, about how he had bought the tarpaulins the paintings were executed upon from a truck driver in Mexico, where he was surfing. The students didn't appear to be enthralled by this tale, which caused Schnabel to redouble his efforts to charm them.

"Normally, I paint outside in Montauk," he said. "If you paint something

Who knew all those double lattes
would end up being so relaxing?



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inside, it might not look good outside, but if you paint something outside, it will always look good inside."

"What do you do in the winter?" Jason Lee, a seventeen-year-old from Chicago, asked. He was dressed in an oversized white V-neck undershirt and black skintight jeans. Schnabel glanced over to see if Lee was mocking him and, on deciding that he might be, smiled approvingly. After that, Schnabel insisted on keeping Lee near him. "Where's Jason? Where'd he go?"

Unlike many artists, Schnabel enjoys talking about his work and himself. His voice is seductive; it somehow manages to sound like both Brooklyn, where he was born, and Brownsville, Texas, where he lived as a child. "He sounds like your boyfriend when he's talking to you on the phone," his twenty-four-



Julian Schnabel and Jason Lee

year-old daughter, Stella, said. "He makes you feel the way you wish a boyfriend would make you feel." Schnabel talked to the students about Walt Whitman and the idea of reality as a horizontal plane in which all things—trees, buildings, people—are equal. He made them stand very close to the paintings, to smell them. He paced from canvas to canvas with a stately, cat-like tread.

For lunch, Schnabel led the group to a pizzeria nearby. On the way, Lee asked, "What's the worst thing you can do as an artist?"

"Try to get people to like you."

At the restaurant, Schnabel directed Lee to sit next to him. "You know, you remind me of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Did you see my film about him?" Lee had. "You should see it again."

Lee announced that he wanted to change his name. Schnabel suggested Earl, because "Earl Lee is better than late."

The waiter offered cappuccino.

"Al Pacino? He's not here," the artist called out, and looked at Lee to see if he laughed. Lee didn't seem to be listening.

After lunch, Schnabel stopped in front of a small patch of freshly planted daffodils and tulips. Next to it sat a discarded container and some scraps of wood stuffed inside a cardboard box. Schnabel said, "Now, this looks like it could be art. A little plastic, some flowers, and some cardboard." Everyone stopped and watched while he rearranged the trash on the sidewalk.

"It's beautiful!" Lee exclaimed, lingering to stare at the garbage and the flowers as the master continued down the street.

—John Seabrook

HARDWARE RING A DING DING



The bells in the tower of the MetLife Building used to be an everyday feature of life for several blocks around Madison Square, the Westminster chimes sounding on the quarter-hour, like Big Ben. Newcomers to the neighborhood assumed that they were hearing church bells, until they noticed that there wasn't any church—at least, not one with a bell tower—and realized that what they were hearing was insurance bells. The words that go with the melody (adapted from a measure of Handel's "Messiah," for a bell tower at Cambridge) are peculiarly apt for an insurance company: "O Lord our Guide / Be Thou our Guide / That by Thy help / No foot shall slide."

Then, in 2001, the bells were turned off during renovation work. MetLife

sold the building and moved uptown to the former Pan Am Building, and the new owners, a group of investment bankers with a scheme for gutting the tower and refurbishing it as an Ian Schrager hotel, did not turn the bells back on.

In October of 2005, the Madison Square Park Conservancy commissioned Bill Fontana, a sound artist, to create a piece for the park's ongoing sculpture series. "I knew I wanted the bells to be part of the piece," Fontana said recently, at the opening ceremony for the sound sculpture, called "Panoramic Echoes." A mild-looking man of sixty, Fontana was dressed in black, with a black stocking cap and a black backpack, from one zippered compartment of which popped a loop of thick white electric cord. He said of the building, with its high loggias, eyelet windows, and golden cupola, "It was modelled after the Campanile of San Marco, in Venice. When it was built, in 1909, it was the tallest building in the world. It's still the tallest working bell tower."

Fontana, who is based in San Francisco, came to New York as a composer in the late sixties and was influenced by the minimalist aesthetic of John Cage and Steve Reich. Whereas they developed electronic music, he has concentrated on finding patterns in ambient sound—a foghorn, say, or the groanings and whistlings of a bridge—and relocating that sound to someplace that jars it into art. It might be called "found music." He knew he was onto something in 1976, when he recorded a total eclipse of the sun in a rain forest in Australia. "Most people think of an eclipse as a visual experience," he said. "It is a strong auditory experience as well."

The bells of MetLife are visible from the ground, especially at night, when they're backlit. There are four of them, and four clockfaces. The original clock mechanism, an old brass-and-wood structure comprising springs and gears and pulleys, is in a basement of the tower. About halfway up the tower, a solenoid relays an electrical impulse from the clock mechanism to small coils that activate the hammers that ring the bells. It fell to the Madison Square Park Conservancy to persuade the banker owners to turn the bells on and to arrange for the keeper of the bells, Paul

Iaboni, an electrician who works at the MetLife Building, to push the button.

To reach the bells, Fontana, Iaboni, and Tony Rossello, the project manager, took an elevator to the forty-first floor. From there, they climbed a spiral staircase to a dim and dusty landing on the forty-fifth floor. Up one more twisting flight they opened a door and were greeted by daylight and one of the bells—the largest weighs seven thousand pounds—swallowing a dizzying view of Manhattan, Long Island, and New Jersey. Fontana put a microphone in each bell, and he and Rossello planted an antenna that transmitted the sound to four huge parabolic speakers placed on nearby buildings.

Shortly before noon, on the day the bells went live, the birds started twittering like crazy. Only when you looked at the treetops and realized that pigeons don't sing did it occur to you that these birds were on tape. Fontana has a large collection of taped birdsong, and he mixed their singing with the bells. He chose his birds—nightingales, meadowlarks, mockingbirds, cardinals, robins, and song sparrows—with two criteria in mind: "The sounds had to be seasonal," meaning they had to be spring calls, "and they had to project well."

At twelve, the birds fell silent and the full set of Westminster chimes sounded in the city for the first time in six years: the live bells rang out from the tower, echoed up the street, and floated down over the park; after a pause, twelve solemn strokes from the deepest bell tolled the hour, the echoes fading gradually into the pure sound of the park, which is traffic.

—Mary Norris

POSTSCRIPT DAVID HALBERSTAM

In 1963, the notion that a newspaper reporter might challenge the official story of generals and ambassadors in the middle of a war, essentially accusing them of lying, was so improbable that it could have occurred only to someone still in his twenties. The Second World War and the unquestionable prestige that it conferred on men in uniform were only a generation old. David Halberstam, who died in a car accident on April 23rd, at the age of seventy-three,

was a product of the Cold War, a self-described "square from the fifties" who went off to cover the obscure conflict in Southeast Asia believing that it was a necessary front in a global struggle. He was a liberal anti-Communist, like the leaders of the war. But Halberstam was also a Jewish kid from the Bronx, big and immodest, with oversized hands, clawing his way into the elite culture into which those leaders had been born; his colleague and friend Neil Sheehan later wrote, "His insecurity showed . . . in his compulsion to be recognized and in his need to test himself."

When Halberstam applied his enormous energy to uncovering the failures of the South Vietnamese Army in the Mekong Delta and was met with denials and disdain from American officials, he responded with a personal, vengeful rage. At a Fourth of July party at the United States Ambassador's residence in Saigon, he refused to shake hands with General Paul Harkins, the fatuously optimistic commander of the American advisory effort. Halberstam's wartime work will last not just because of its quality and its importance but because it established a new mode of journalism, one with which Americans are now so familiar that it's difficult to remember that someone had to invent it. The notion of the reporter as fearless truth-teller has become a narcissistic cliché that fits fewer practitioners than would like to claim it. "David changed war reporting forever," Richard Holbrooke, who had known him in Vietnam, said last week. "He made it not only possible but even romantic to write that your own side was misleading the public about how the war was going. But everything depended on David getting it right, and he did."

Halberstam went on to write twenty books on almost as many subjects, but historical memory, more ruthless than any of his editors, will eventually cull from them one enduring achievement. "The Best and the Brightest," which consumed Halberstam from 1969 to 1972, has the feverish atmosphere of an obsession, and if its prose shows the excesses that later subjected him to criticism and parody, in this instance the subject fully deserved his passionate treatment. "The basic question be-

hind the book," he later wrote, "was why men who were said to be the ablest to serve in government this century had been the architects of what struck me as likely to be the worst tragedy since the Civil War." When the book was published, Mary McCarthy wrote a scathing assessment in *The New York Review of Books*. It read like pulp historical fiction, she wrote, without a purpose: "I cannot think who will be benefited by 'The Best and the Brightest,' who corrected or instructed." McCarthy, whose own work on Vietnam consisted of a sympathetic report after a brief visit to Hanoi, was seldom more spectacularly wrong. Halberstam had invented a new genre, the Washington book (now published annually by the dozen), in this case on a tragic historical scale, and with a purpose: to take the reader into the lives of the men around Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, to show why their biographies and talents not only failed to prevent the mistakes of Vietnam but made them almost inevitable.

I read "The Best and the Brightest" in Iraq in the summer of 2004. By then, that war had gone badly, perhaps irretrievably, wrong, and Halberstam's three-decade-old book seemed like front-page news. Halberstam was critical of some of the reporting on Iraq, especially during the prewar period and the invasion. It didn't always meet his standard of unflinching truthfulness. Perhaps an element of professional caution had settled over ambitious journalists, as it had over ambitious military officers and government officials. Halberstam's reporting in Vietnam drew on sources, such as Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann, who risked and sometimes lost their careers. In Iraq, no high-ranking soldier or civilian has been audacious enough to get fired for telling the truth, and it's almost impossible to imagine a young correspondent refusing to shake the hand of a commanding general in the Green Zone. But that summer, among reporters in Baghdad, "The Best and the Brightest" kept coming up in conversation, making it clear that any historical account that may be written about the origins of this new war will have only one model.

—George Packer

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ANNALS OF LAW

THE CSI EFFECT

The truth about forensic science.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

On the evening of March 10, 2003, two New York Police Department detectives, James V. Nemorin and Rodney J. Andrews, were shot and killed in an unmarked police car while attempting an undercover purchase of a Tec-9 assault pistol on Staten Island. The case was significant not just because two officers had died but because the man who was eventually charged with the murders, Ronell Wilson, faced the possibility of becoming the first person in more than fifty years to be executed for a crime in New York State.

The government's theory was that Wilson, who was with an accomplice in the back seat of the car, shot the detectives during a robbery attempt. Among the evidence retrieved from the crime scene were hundreds of hairs and fibres, and prosecutors enlisted Lisa Faber, a criminalist and the supervisor of the N.Y.P.D. crime lab's hair-and-fibre unit, to testify at Wilson's trial, last winter. Under questioning in Brooklyn federal court, Faber said that she had compared samples of fabric from the detectives' car with fibres found on gloves, jeans, and a baseball cap that Wilson had allegedly been wearing on the night of the crime. The prosecutor asked Faber to describe the methods and equipment she had used to make her analysis. Then she asked Faber what she had found. "My conclusion is that all of those questioned fibres could have originated from the interior of the Nissan Maxima, from the seats, and/or the backrests," Faber said. She added that in her field "the strongest association you can say is that 'it could have come from'" the source in question.

Faber's testimony was careful and responsible—and not very significant. She could not say how common the automobile fabric that she had examined is, or how many models and brands use it. Nor could she say how likely it was that the fabric from the car would show

up on Wilson's clothes. Faber used no statistics, because there was no way to establish with any precision the probability that the fibres came from the detectives' car. DNA tests had proved that blood from one of the detectives was on Wilson's clothes, and based on this fact, as well as on testimony from his accomplice and from Faber, Wilson was convicted and sentenced to death. "Given how much evidence they had in the case, I wasn't crucial," Faber told me. "The prosecutors liked the idea of fibre evidence in addition to everything else. Maybe they thought the jury would like it because it was more 'CSI'-esque."

"CSI: Crime Scene Investigation," the CBS television series, and its two spinoffs—"CSI: Miami" and "CSI: New York"—routinely appear near the top of the Nielsen ratings. (A recent international survey, based on ratings from 2005, concluded that "CSI: Miami" was the most popular program in the world.) In large part because of the series' success, Faber's profession has acquired an air of glamour, and its practitioners an aura of infallibility. "I just met with the conference of Louisiana judges, and, when I asked if 'CSI' had influenced their juries, every one of them raised their hands," Carol Henderson, the director of the National Clearinghouse for Science, Technology and the Law, at Stetson University, in Florida, told me. "People are riveted by the idea that science can solve crimes." At the Las Vegas criminalistics bureau where the original version of the show is set, the number of job applications has increased dramatically in the past few years. In the pilot for the series, which was broadcast in 2000, Gil Grissom, the star criminalist, who is played by William Petersen, solved a murder by comparing toenail clippings. "If I can match the nail in the sneaker to the suspect's clipping..." Grissom mused, then did just that. In the next

episode, the Las Vegas investigators solved a crime by comparing striation marks on bullets. "We got a match," one said. Later in the same show, Nick Stokes (George Eads) informs Grissom, his boss, "I just finished the carpet-swatch comparisons. Got a match."

The fictional criminalists speak with a certainty that their real-life counterparts

help bring about convictions. In the mid-nineteen-nineties, nuclear-DNA analysis—which can link suspects to crime-scene evidence with mathematical certainty—became widely available, prompting some legal scholars to argue that older, less reliable tests, such as hair and fibre analysis, should no longer be allowed in court. In 1996,

F.B.I., was fiercely criticized by several members of the commission, including one of the co-chairs, Harry T. Edwards, a senior federal-appeals-court judge. "It sounds like there is a lot of impressionistic and subjective examination going on," Edwards said, after Houck described the study. "Follow-up examiners repeated [the analyses]



Lisa Faber, the supervisor of the N.Y.P.D. crime lab's hair-and-fibre unit. Photograph by Gus Powell.

do not. "We never use the word 'match,'" Faber, a thirty-eight-year-old Harvard graduate, told me. "The terminology is very important. On TV, they always like to say words like 'match,' but we say 'similar,' or 'could have come from' or 'is associated with.'"

Virtually all the forensic-science tests depicted on "CSI"—including analyses of bite marks, blood spatter, handwriting, firearm and tool marks, and voices, as well as of hair and fibres—rely on the judgments of individual experts and cannot easily be subjected to statistical verification. Many of the tests were developed by police departments more than a hundred years ago, and for decades they have been admitted as evidence in criminal trials to

the authors of an exhaustive study of forensic hair comparisons published in the *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* concluded, "If the purveyors of this dubious science cannot do a better job of validating hair analysis than they have done so far, forensic hair comparison analysis should be excluded altogether from criminal trials."

Last week, a commission on forensic science sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences held an open session in Washington at which several participants questioned the validity of hair and fibre evidence. Max Houck, the director of the Forensic Science Initiative at West Virginia University and the co-author of an important study that reviewed hair analyses by the

and made the same mistakes," Edwards said. "That's the scariest part."

Sir Robert Peel is credited with creating the first modern police force, the bobbies, in London, in 1829, but the transformation of law enforcement, and especially forensic science, into a professional discipline was a haphazard affair. Scientists occasionally took an interest in police work, and courts sometimes accepted their testimony. Oddly, one prominent early figure in the field developed specialties in both bullets and hair, which have little in common except that both are often found at crime scenes. In 1910, Victor Balthazard, a professor of forensic medicine at the Sorbonne, published the first comprehensive study of

hair, "Le Poil de l'Homme et des Animaux," and three years later, in an influential article, he theorized that the grooves inside every gun barrel leave a unique imprint on bullets that pass through it. In the mid-twenties, Calvin Goddard, a New York doctor, began using a comparison microscope, which allows an analyst to examine two slides at the same time, to study bullets. In 1929, he analyzed bullets collected at the site of the St. Valentine's Day massacre, in which gunmen wearing police uniforms shot and killed six members of George (Bugs) Moran's gang and a seventh man. Goddard test-fired all eight machine guns owned by the Chicago police and found no match with the bullets used in the crime. Two years later, he examined two submachine guns retrieved from the home of Fred Burke, a sometime hit man for Al Capone, Moran's great rival. Goddard pronounced Burke's guns the murder weapons, and the feat so impressed local leaders that they established a crime lab, the nation's first, and installed Goddard as its director.

The comparison microscopes in the N.Y.P.D. crime lab are more powerful than Goddard's model was, but many of the techniques the lab uses haven't changed substantially in decades. Situated in a remote part of Queens, in a sprawling office building that formerly belonged to York College of the City University of New York, the crime lab combines municipal decrepitude and state-of-the-art technology. The seating

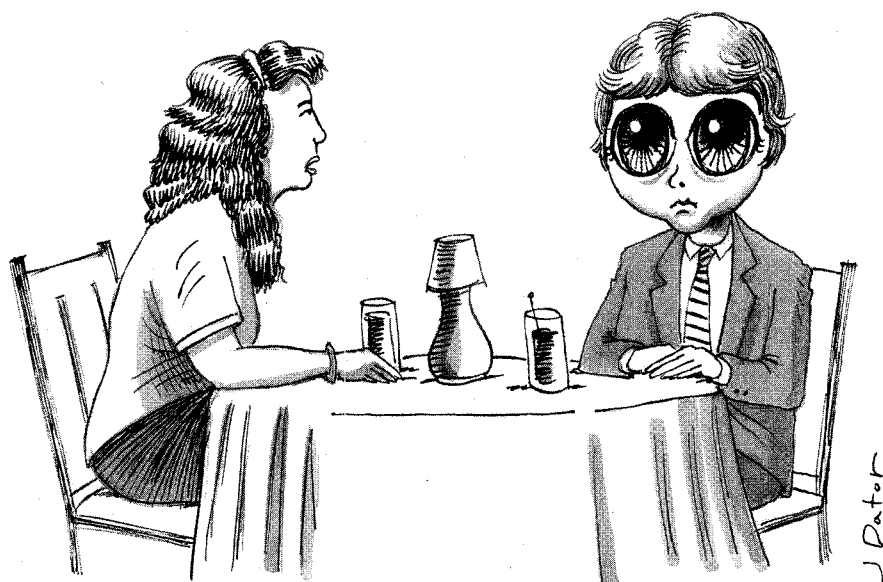
area in the lobby includes an old mini-van bench, complete with a dangling seat belt. There are six analysts in Faber's hair-and-fibre unit, and each has a polarized-light microscope, which costs about fifteen thousand dollars. In addition, the unit has two comparison microscopes, which cost fifty thousand dollars, but only one phone line, which doesn't have voicemail. Having worked for the N.Y.P.D. for nearly a decade, Faber has acquired a weary proficiency in the department's eccentricities. "We have some of the best lab equipment in the country, maybe as good as the F.B.I.," she told me recently, when I visited her at the lab. "But for the little stuff we have to scrounge."

Faber's father, a German businessman, was transferred by his company to Manchester, New Hampshire, in 1966, two years before Lisa was born. She was in junior high school when she became interested in trace-evidence analysis, which includes hair and fibre. "It was the time of the Atlanta child murders," she recalled, referring to the killings of more than two dozen children and young men in the city between 1979 and 1981. "I would sit there watching the news and see how they were connecting the murders through fibres at the murder scenes. It just fascinated me that you could have a body floating in a river and still find fibre evidence that would connect it to a car." The trace evidence was critical in the case against Wayne Williams, a twenty-three-year-old aspiring music promoter,

who was convicted of two of the murders and sentenced to two life terms. No one has been charged in connection with the other deaths. (In February, following years of unsuccessful appeals by Williams, lawyers for Georgia agreed to allow DNA tests on some of the hair used as evidence in the case. Results of the tests have not yet been reported.)

At Harvard, Faber majored in East Asian Studies. "I still followed murder cases, and the Internet was just getting started not long after I graduated," she recalled. "So I looked around to see what kind of graduate programs in forensic science there might be around the country. There were four." One was at George Washington University, where she enrolled. Her first class, in trace analysis, was taught by a former F.B.I. special agent named Hal Deadman. "He passed around materials on that first day, and they were from the Atlanta murders. He had been an investigator on the case. I thought, I can't believe this. This is perfect for me." Two years later, having completed a master's degree, Faber joined the N.Y.P.D., where she earns about seventy thousand dollars a year. A tall woman, who usually wears her long blond hair in a barrette, Faber has an apartment in Greenwich Village, where few other N.Y.P.D. employees live. "No one ever steals my lunch out of the office refrigerator," she said. "People ask me, 'That's all you're eating—vegetables?'"

When a piece of evidence, usually a garment, arrives in Faber's unit, a junior analyst pats a strip of clear tape on the fabric, to pick up any loose hairs or fibres. The tape strips are then placed face down on a plastic sheet, which is given to a more senior person to study under a relatively low-powered stereo microscope. "I've got to do a screening at this point, just to see what might be useful to examine in greater detail," Faber told me. "As far as hair goes, I'm looking only for head hair and pubic hair, because arm or chest hair doesn't have enough variation to be useful for comparison. If I see a fibre, I'll circle it with my green Sharpie. If I see a hair, I'll circle it in red. A brown circle means I'm not sure what it is. When I'm done, I take my tweezers and remove each hair and fibre and glue them onto slides. Now I'm really ready to begin my analysis."



"I'm sorry, Steve, I was only dating you for the kitsch value."

According to a long-established practice of hair analysis, the examiners study between twenty and thirty characteristics of each hair. (Only hairs whose roots are intact—typically because they have been pulled from someone's head—and are in the growing stage have nuclear DNA, which is unique to each person; the vast majority of hairs found at crime scenes lack roots suitable for testing.) "The first thing we look at is pigment—color," Faber said. "Is there dye or bleach, and how much of it? We like it when there's dye, because it makes a hair distinctive. Then there is the cuticle, which is like the yellow on a pencil—the outside—and we see if it's damaged or serrated." One of the things that make hair analysis so challenging is that a person can have hairs of many different colors on his or her head. Nor can ethnicity be established with certainty on the basis of hair samples alone. "Hair is curly because of diameter variation," Faber explained. "A black person's hair typically has a lot of diameter variation. Asian people have little variation, which is what makes it straight." Faber has hundreds of slides of hair that she has collected from around the world and uses to train junior analysts. "I ask my friends to give me their hair," she said.

For the Wilson case, Faber examined more than a hundred pieces of evidence, including the victims' clothes, the suspects' clothes, and the interior of the car, along with two do-rags and other items seized from the street. From this material, Faber recovered thousands of fibres and hundreds of hairs, each of which had to be assessed under a microscope.

"The examinations involving the car were especially difficult and time-consuming," she said. For Faber, the key question in the case was whether she could identify fibres on Wilson's clothing which resembled those taken from the car. "There were hundreds of fibres that looked stereoscopically similar at lower power magnifications—that is, up to fifty times—but many of them were in fact different in chemical composition," she said. "I could tell them apart only when I mounted each fibre on a slide and examined it under two hundred to four hundred magnification with a polarized-light microscope. It's only at that level that you can see what you need to know to identify the chemical composition of the fibre, like whether it's polyester, nylon, or acrylic." Once she had eliminated those fibres which could not have come from the car, Faber performed two additional tests on the remaining set: a Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy, to establish and compare chemical composition, and microspectrophotometry, to compare color. Working quickly, Faber said, she could complete perhaps five F.T.I.R. and MSP analyses a day; evaluating all the evidence in the case took her two and a half years.

Several times a year, at the New York Police Academy, Faber lectures about trace analysis in a criminal-investigations course, which generally attracts about a hundred mid-career detectives and other investigators. Earlier this spring, she had the misfortune of appearing late in the three-week course, which meant that the students—about ninety beefy men and six women in an overheated classroom—listened and observed in varied states of consciousness.

"With trace analysis, what we are doing is comparing a 'q' to a 'k,'" Faber told the group. "A 'q' is a questioned sample from a crime scene—a paint chip on someone's clothing from a hit and run, a hair in the hand of a murder victim. The source is unknown. The 'k' is a known sample—a hair from the autopsy, or one that you take from a suspect. What we do in the trace-analysis unit are comparisons with 'q's and 'k's. We see if there is a connection."

Faber's brief summary defined the dilemma at the heart of forensic science. "There are really two kinds of forensic science," says Michael J. Saks, a professor of law and psychology at Arizona State University, and a prominent critic of the way such science is used in courtrooms. "The first is very straightforward. It says, 'We have a dead body. Let's see what chemicals are in the blood. Is there alcohol? Cocaine?' That is real science applied to a forensics problem. The other half of forensic science has been invented by and for police departments, and that includes fingerprints, handwriting, tool marks, tire marks, hair and fibre. All of those essentially share one belief, which is that there are no two specimens

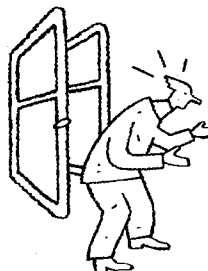
that are alike except those from the same source." Saks and other experts argue that there is no objective basis for making the link between a "q" and a "k." "There is no scientific evidence, no validation studies, or anything else that scientists usually demand, for that proposition—that, say, two hairs that look alike came from the same person," Saks said. "It's the individualization fallacy, and it's not real science. It's faith-based science."

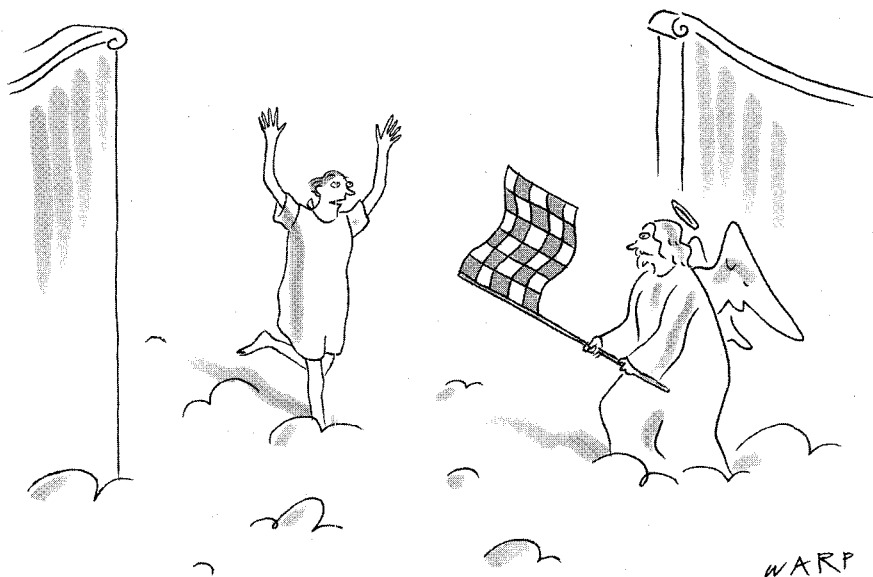
Virtually all experts agree about the reliability of DNA evidence. "DNA is based on a well-known technology and scientific principles that have a lot of uses outside the lab and a lot of good validation data,"

D. Michael Risinger, a professor at Seton Hall University School of Law, said. "You will typically know what the error rates are. The tests produce actual probability statements about results. It's real science." Currently, two kinds of DNA are subject to forensic testing: nuclear DNA and mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which is passed from mother to child. Unlike nuclear DNA, mtDNA can be extracted even from hairs that lack roots; though mtDNA tests cannot establish a precise match, they can eliminate many potential suspects. In the past two years, New York authorities have begun conducting mtDNA tests on some evidence.

At last week's session on forensic science in Washington, Max Houck explained that he and his co-author, Bruce Budowle, a senior scientist at the F.B.I. Laboratory, had used mtDNA technology to test the validity of hair analysis. The authors reviewed the results of a hundred and seventy microscopic hair examinations, which produced eighty associations between "q" and "k" samples. But subsequent mtDNA tests of the hairs showed that in nine cases—more than ten per cent—the samples could not have come from the same person. The number of errors was concerning, Judge Edwards said. According to his calculations, he added, the study's error rate was actually close to thirty-five per cent. How, he asked Houck, was such a flawed process acceptable?

Houck challenged Judge Edwards's use of the word "error," arguing that mtDNA tests provided a way to refine the more general conclusions of micro-





scopic examinations. To illustrate his point, Houck offered an analogy: "Suppose you have an art expert who is looking at three possible van Goghs. He sees that all three are consistent with his style. But then a chemical test comes along that shows two of them were painted after van Gogh died. They're not van Goghs, but that doesn't mean that the art expert was wrong about them. They may have been consistent with his style. It's the same with hair analysis. The subsequent DNA tests don't mean that the original tests were wrong, just that a more refined test has come along."

"I don't think your analogy holds at all," Edwards said. "Those are real errors, and this is not about art history. My great worry is that there are a lot of people going to jail on bad information."

Margaret A. Berger, a professor at Brooklyn Law School, added, "We know from a lot of DNA exonerations that they come from bad hair evidence. So the real question raised by your study is whether the courts should ever allow microscopic evidence when there is no DNA to back it up? If there is no mtDNA, I think it should be excluded."

"Let me ask you this," Channing R. Robertson, a professor of chemical engineering at Stanford, said to Houck. "Suppose your son or daughter was accused of a crime, and someone came on the stand and gave their qualifications as a hair examiner, and made an association based on microscopic examination, and that led to the conviction of your

child. Would you feel that justice had been served?"

After an awkward pause, Houck said, "Not unless there was mtDNA as well."

Houck's critics focussed on the possibility of errors by well-meaning hair-and-fibre analysts, but the field has also been beset by scandals. Incompetent or malevolent trace-evidence examiners in several states, including Texas, West Virginia, and Illinois, have produced scores of tainted verdicts, many of which have been uncovered by the Innocence Project, the legal-advocacy group founded fifteen years ago by the defense attorneys Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld. In a 1987 case involving the rape of an eight-year-old girl, Arnold Melnikoff, the manager of the Montana state crime lab, testified that there was a "less than one in ten thousand chance" that hairs found at the crime scene did not belong to the defendant, Jimmy Ray Bromgard, who was convicted. In 2002, a DNA test of sperm found on the victim's underwear established Bromgard's innocence, and several more cases in which Melnikoff testified have been overturned or called into question. (John Grisham's recent best-seller, "The Innocent Man," is a nonfiction account of a 1988 murder case in Oklahoma, in which faulty hair analysis, among other things, led to an unjust conviction.) As Faber acknowledges, "There have been horrible cases involving bad hair examiners." (Last month, the N.Y.P.D. released the results of an internal investigation of its crime lab, which

revealed that in 2002 two technicians in the controlled-substances division had failed a department proficiency test. This information was not reported to the national accreditation body for forensic labs, as the department is required by law to do. The police commissioner, Raymond W. Kelly, replaced the deputy chief who supervised the lab and ordered the creation of an oversight panel.)

Faber and her colleagues, unlike their fictional counterparts on TV, do not visit crime scenes, leaving evidence collection to specially trained N.Y.P.D. officers. Nevertheless, working in the hair-and-fibre lab has given Faber a macabre expertise in city life. She is often called on to examine the clothing of crime victims and suspects, and she has noticed that patterns recur. "They like big clothes," she told me, referring to the suspects. "We frequently see sizes like 4X."

Faber has recently taken steps to combine traditional hair and fibre analysis with more modern, and accurate, technology. One day last month, Faber's colleague Debbie Hartmann was working over a gray Rocawear sweatshirt with tape and tweezers, trying to find hairs to analyze. The sweatshirt had been left behind during a burglary of a house in Queens, and Hartmann was examining it as part of a new project that Faber has implemented in the crime lab. "The city has had a program in place for a long time where we see if we can do DNA testing in every murder and rape," Faber told me. "But we thought there was no reason not to do burglaries as well. We know that burglars often change their clothes when they're inside a house, so they don't look the same coming out as they did coming in. They leave their tools like screwdrivers behind. They eat food and drink the beer in the fridge. They don't want to leave fingerprints, so they wear rubber gloves and leave them behind. That turns out to be better, because the gloves have DNA from their skin cells, which is better evidence than fingerprints. All of that stuff they leave behind can be tested for DNA, so we decided to do it." (The N.Y.P.D. crime lab, unlike police departments in many other cities, does no DNA testing itself; Faber and her colleagues send evidence for testing to

the medical examiner in the Department of Health, or to private contractors.)

The burglary program, which is known as Biotracks and is funded with a grant from the National Institute of Justice, began in 2003, with a pilot program in northern Queens. It was soon expanded to cover the whole city. As of last week, Faber's team—it consists of, in addition to Faber, a police sergeant and another criminalist—had analyzed twenty-three hundred and thirty cases and found DNA profiles in fifteen hundred and forty-one of them. The results of these tests have been placed in the F.B.I.'s Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), a database of more than four million DNA profiles from across the country, and almost three hundred suspects have been identified.

Some of Biotracks' success stories resemble plots of "CSI" episodes. In 2004, Stanley Jenkins, a forty-seven-year-old man who had a criminal record, broke into a residence in Queens and stole jewelry and camera equipment. He used a tissue to wipe away his fingerprints, and no prints were found in the house. But the tissue yielded a DNA sample, and Jenkins was convicted after a trial and sentenced to twenty years to life. The same year, Faber's team found matching DNA on broken windows in a series of smash-and-grab burglaries at several Manhattan stores, including Tourneau, Coach, and Fendi. Police officers picked up a man named David Gibson because he resembled the suspect in the case, and detectives noticed that he had a bandaged wound on his left hand. They offered to change the dressing and submitted the old bandage for DNA testing, which tied Gibson to the crimes.

In 2005, in perhaps the most bizarre case to date, the Biotracks group took a DNA sample from a soda bottle that a burglar had drunk from at a house in the Bronx. The DNA profile identified a pair of identical twins, Kenneth Williams and Andre Fuller, who were both in the CODIS system because they had criminal records. (Only identical twins have the same nuclear DNA.) It turned out that at the time of the burglary Williams was incarcerated, so when Fuller was arrested in an unrelated case he was charged with the burglary. (The case is pending.) "We never did figure out how twins had different last names," Faber said.

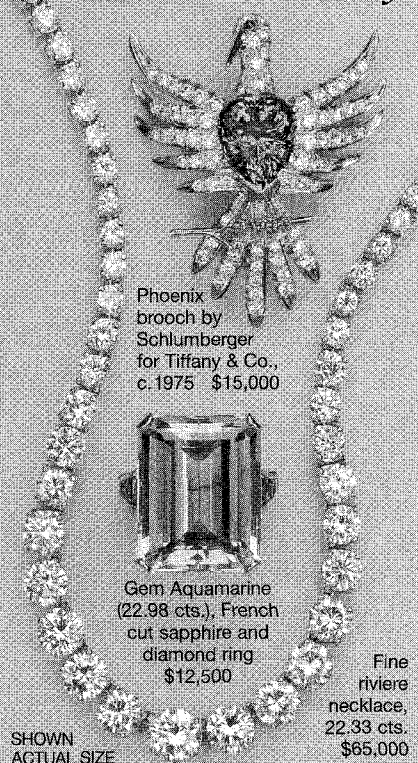
Faber regards Biotracks as one way of tethering her field to the rigorous science of DNA. "I know everyone wants to go straight to the DNA lab these days, and I don't blame them," she said. "But they have to come to us first, and for good reason. Ninety per cent of the hair recovered at a crime scene doesn't have roots in the right stage of growth. You need roots for nuclear DNA. You might ask, Why is microscopic trace examination necessary? Why not submit all hairs for DNA analysis immediately? But you cannot go to the medical examiner with two hundred hairs. We have so many crimes and hairs. Hairs are everywhere. We couldn't possibly give every hair to the m.e. We have to screen it first, see if there is a possibility of any kind of DNA test, and then we can send it over."

There is wisdom, but also some poignancy, in Faber's efforts to modernize the N.Y.P.D.'s hair-and-fibre unit. The success of the Biotracks program suggests that the best thing hair analysts can do is turn themselves into initial screeners for the test that really matters—DNA. Soon the demand for the kind of testimony that Faber provided in the Ronell Wilson case may be limited, especially if the commission sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences publishes a report harshly critical of the field's current practices. (In 1992, a similar commission released a blue-ribbon federal report that resulted in the widespread use of DNA evidence in courtrooms.)

Faber is ambivalent about "CSI"—flattered by the attention it has brought to her profession but mindful of the cinematic license taken by the program's creators. She has noticed, for example, a new kind of applicant for jobs at the crime lab. "They're waiting for their interviews, and they look like they're auditioning for a hip profession," she said. "It's not the nerdy-looking people anymore. They don't realize that there is nothing cool or funky about this job."

A few years ago, when CBS was considering launching the "CSI: New York" spinoff, Faber showed Anthony Zuiker, the creator of "CSI," and his colleagues around the crime lab. "They were great, really nice, and we were happy that they decided to do the show," she said. "But in the end they decided to do it in their studio in California." ♦

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WHAT I AM

BY IAN FRAZIER

One of my jobs around the house is to load and run the dishwasher. I believe I do this job very successfully. The other day, I loaded both racks, top and bottom, according to a special method that I have. Then I turned the machine on. As a result of some mishap, during the wash cycle a number of the dishes were broken, including a serving dish with a pattern of leaves and olives which my wife had particularly liked. While unloading the dishwasher, she discovered the breakage, and she brought the pieces of the dish to show me. I expressed sympathy and then began to describe my method of dishwasher loading. This did not make much headway with her, because she disagrees with my method and in fact has asked me several times not to use it. I kept trying to explain, and in the course of the discussion just for a second she lost control and said something hurtful and unkind. I will not go into details, except to say that she referred to me as an "idiot" (quotation marks mine).

O.K.; point taken. Based on some of the things I do and their consequences, her characterization of me is not inaccurate, as far as it goes. What I object to isn't so much that as the terminology employed. Quite simply, "idiot" is not a nice word to call somebody, and I find myself asking, as Mr. Welch did of Senator Joseph McCarthy, "Have you no sense of decency, sir?" Throughout my life, I have had to struggle to keep from thinking of myself in the limiting way that word implies. So, for the record, I would like it known that I am not an "idiot." I am a person who suffers from idiocy. Nobody knows what it is like to deal with crippling bouts of idiocy while trying to lead a normal life. The last thing I need is for somebody to make it harder by pointing out what an "idiot" I am.

Here's an example of what I'm talking about: One day in December, I drove my wife to the bus stop. Before we got in the car, she gave me a greeting card for the

cleaning people. I was to drop her off, go to the A.T.M., take out some cash, put it in the envelope with the card, and give it as a holiday thank-you to the cleaning people. I did not want the card rattling around in the front with me, so I opened the back door and laid the card in the middle of the back. The back seats had been folded down, and I put the card as far as possible from any crack it might slip into as a result of a swerve or a sudden stop.

While we were driving, my wife asked me for the card. She wanted to write a little note to the cleaning people and sign it. I told her the card was in the back. She turned around and saw it there. She undid her seat belt, crawled over her seat, and stretched out to reach it. She couldn't quite get to it, though, and she had to crawl even farther, until only her feet were in the passenger seat. She grabbed the card and then eventually was able to slide back over the seat. Her clothes had become mussed, and I could tell that she was making an effort not to say what she thought.

Now, was it "idiotic" (her word, unspoken) of me to put the card in the back, equidistant from hazardous cracks? Well, yes—and no. I believe I could argue both sides of this question, and convince you of the justice of either one. But I'm afraid that would only help to make my wife's larger point. Nobody but a moron, in other words, would even think about such idiotic topics. So I have decided that the wiser course is to drop the matter entirely.

By coincidence, just now I heard my wife downstairs reloading the dishwasher that I filled with breakfast and lunch dishes not half an hour ago. There were the sounds of dishes clattering and my wife shouting, "No! No! No!"

It's sad that my own wife has been taken in by the many misconceptions associated with people like me. Those of us unfortunate enough to be afflicted with idiocy are not grotesque caricatures or figures of fun. Idiocy can strike anybody, from the man who says he cleaned your

chimney to the President of the United States. Very few of us conform to the old stereotype of the guy in the dunce cap sticking his finger in a light socket. (My wife notes, just parenthetically, that I did stick my finger in a light socket once.) Recently, I was reading a book by Dostoyevsky that I thought dealt with some of these issues in a sensitive way. It's called "The Idiotcy Sufferer," and I am happy to report that in this new translation the terms that cruelly objectify people like me have been updated more inclusively.

Of course, the story's hero, Prince Myshkin, lived in an earlier time and so had to wash his dishes by hand. At the moment, I don't remember whether he dried them with a dish towel or put them in a dish drainer to "air-dry." For people with our disorder, the drying phase seems to be the problematic one. Do you know what a garlic press is? (When telling this story, I've found it is always a good idea to ask.) A garlic press is a device that squeezes a clove of garlic through a grid of tiny holes. Many kitchens have one. This device is hand-operated and made of sturdy metal. You would think it could be put into a dishwasher like any similar utensil.

And that's true; it can. With this important caveat: you must first take out any adhering garlic fibres, those which remain pressed against the back part of the grid with the holes, or in the holes themselves. The dishwasher will not remove those fibres. They're too tightly packed against the thing, or something. And during the wash cycle the water will cause the garlic remnants to get all pasty against the metal, and then, when radiant heat bakes the dishes dry, the garlic fibres will be annealed and heat-sealed to the metal until there is virtually no way of getting them off.

My wife was standing over the sink when I came home from yoga the other day. She had the garlic press in one hand and a toothpick with a frayed end in the other. Broken toothpicks littered the counter. She was picking, scraping, and generally scrabbling at the garlic press to remove the etc., etc. She has, in fact, mentioned this garlic-press problem to me before. She looked at me with an expression I have come to call her "death ray." I said something like "That's right, blame the victim," referring of course to my disorder. I see that we idiocy sufferers have much educating of the public left to do. ♦

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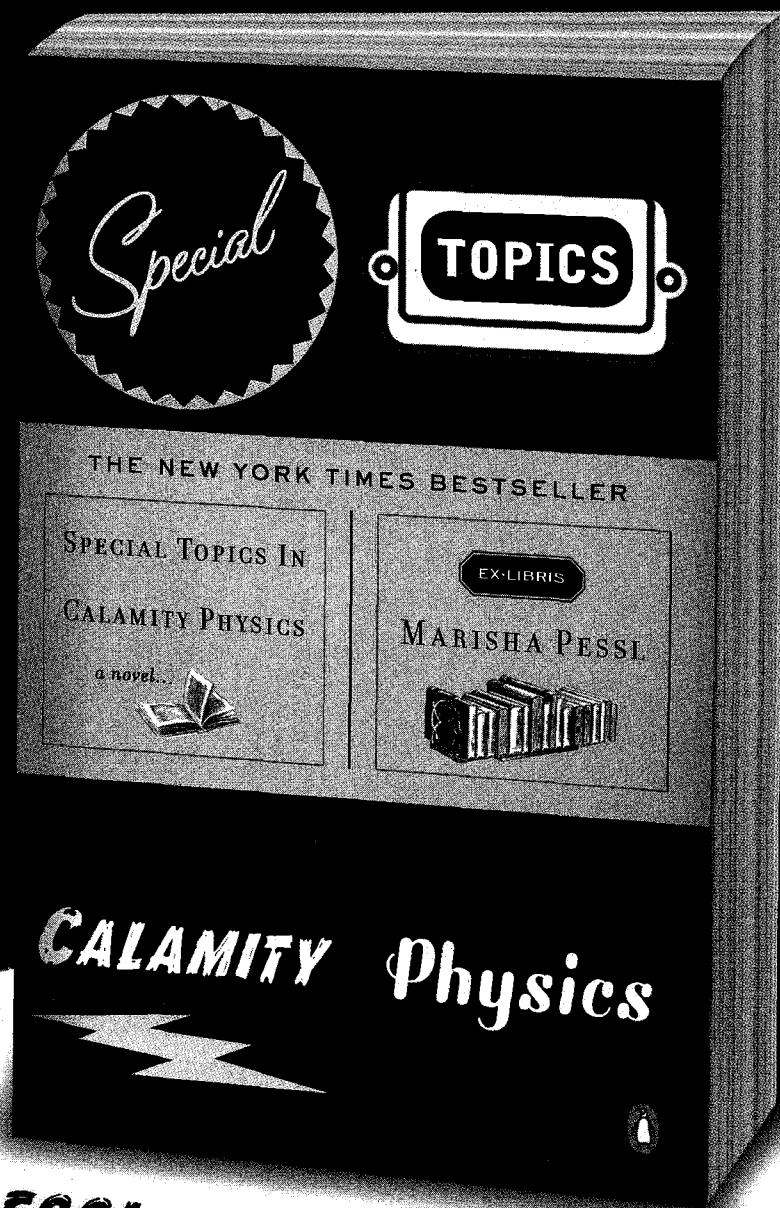
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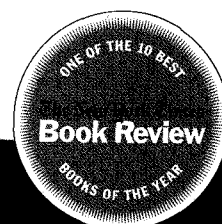


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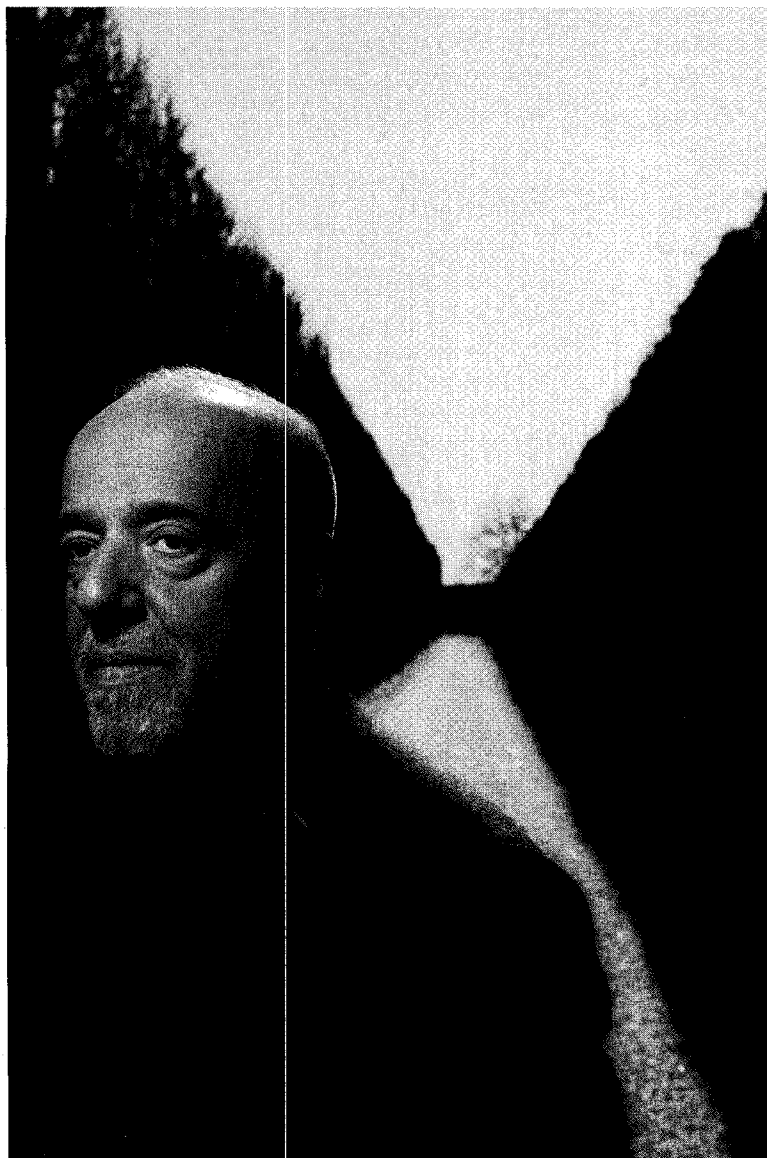
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THE MAGUS

The astonishing appeal of Paulo Coelho.

BY DANA GOODYEAR

*Coelho has sold nearly a hundred million books. Photograph by Joachim Ladefoged.*

Paulo Coelho wrote "The Alchemist" in two weeks, in 1987. It is a story, told in "A Thousand and One Nights" and in Rumi's "Masnavi" and later adapted by Jorge Luis Borges—the version that Coelho, who is Brazilian, first read—of a man who dreams that he must leave home to find a treasure and, upon arriving at his destination, discovers that the treasure is in fact buried in his native land. In Coelho's

telling, the protagonist is an Andalusian shepherd boy (Coelho says that *he* is that shepherd boy) who, bedding down with his flock in an abandoned church, dreams of finding a fortune at the Pyramids, in Egypt. He sells his flock and buys a ticket to Tangier, and in the desert meets an alchemist, from whom he learns that "wherever your heart is, that is where you'll find your treasure." When the boy reaches the Pyramids

and starts digging, a band of thieves attacks him, even as he explains that he's searching for gold revealed to him in a dream. The thieves leave the boy for dead, and their leader, as a final insult, tells him that he, too, has had a recurring dream about buried treasure—his is in an abandoned church in Spain—but is not so stupid as to have believed it. The boy is overjoyed and returns to the church, where he unearths a chest of gold coins. "The Alchemist" has been translated into sixty-four languages and has sold more than twenty million copies. A movie version, which is expected to go into production next year, will star Laurence Fishburne, who wrote the script and who will also direct, as the alchemist.

Coelho's books include eight novels, two memoirs, several collections of occasional writing, a volume of quotations, and "Warrior of the Light: A Manual," a book of platitudes. They have sold nearly a hundred million copies. Bellboys, waitresses, and policemen recognize his face; in the aftermath of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, President Clinton was photographed carrying a copy of "The Alchemist." In his writings, Coelho, who is Catholic—though he says he does not "kiss the hand of the Pope, that's for sure"—presents himself as a searcher and a sage, a hybrid of Carlos Castaneda and Kahlil Gibran. His cosmology, which includes angels and devils, signs, omens, and, for each person, a destiny called his Personal Legend, promises that whatever is sought—love, money, inspiration—can be readily attained. Quotidian events, like weather and coincidence, he sees as miraculous. Many of his books begin with a prayer to Mary and an epigraph from the Gospel according to Luke. "Eleven Minutes," a novel, published in 2003, about a Brazilian prostitute in Geneva, is an exception in that it also has a "hymn to Isis" found at Nag Hammadi. Santiago Pozo, the owner of a Hollywood marketing firm who is working on an adaptation of "The Valkyries," Coelho's memoir of spending forty days in the Mojave Desert, and who describes himself as a "recovering Catholic," says, "The beauty of his writing is his ability to talk to Catholics and Christians but also open the door to a

new understanding of divinity." His special talent seems to be his ability to speak to everyone at once. The kind of spirituality he espouses is open to all comers. Its tenets are sayings like "All things are one"; "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it"; and "The extraordinary is always found in the way of common people." He is a lenient teacher—"It is not a sin to be happy," he writes—and an empathetic one. In the memoirs, and in the introductions to his novels, he emphasizes his own flaws and failures, forgives himself for them, and, by extension, forgives his readers theirs.

Coelho's plots tend to be allegorical, and his readers often say that they see their own lives in his books. His characters, though nominally diverse—a suicidal Slovene in a mental hospital who falls in love ("Veronika Decides to Die"), an orphaned barmaid in a European mountain town whose morals are tested when a stranger comes to town ("The Devil and Miss Prym")—are somehow indeterminate, their nationalities adjectives without great cultural consequence, their struggles universalized. The writing is unadorned and pleasant to read. "It's like music, really, the way that he writes, it's so beautiful," the actress Julia Roberts said in a 2001 television documentary about Coelho. Coelho writes in Portuguese; some literary critics in Brazil joke among themselves that translation must improve his prose. "He writes in a non-literary style, with a message that confirms common sense," Manuel da Costa Pinto, a columnist for *Folha de S. Paulo*, said. "He gives his readers a recipe for happiness."

Mário Maestri, a history professor at the University of Passo Fundo and one of the few Brazilian critics who does not reflexively dismiss Coelho, has written, "In spite of belonging to different genres, Coelho's narratives and self-help books have the same fundamental effect: of anesthetizing the alienated consciousness through the consoling reaffirmation of conventions and prevailing prejudices. Fascinated by his discoveries, the Coelhoist reader explores the familiar, breaks down doors already open, and gets mired in sentimental, tranquilizing, self-centered, conformist, and spellbinding vi-

sions of the world that imprisons him. When he finishes a book, he wants another one that will be different but absolutely the same." Maestri calls the work "yuppie esoteric narrative." As if to prove the point, this winter Starbucks distributed five million Venti cups printed with a Coelho quote: "Remember your dreams and fight for them. You must know what you want from life. There is just one thing that makes your dream become impossible: the fear of failure. Never forget your Personal Legend. Never forget your dreams. . . ."

Coelho is almost sixty. His name, which has been given to a suite at the Hotel Ambasciatori in Rome and to a hot-chocolate drink at Le Bristol hotel in Paris, is pronounced Co-el-you. He is solid and short, with the capable, roughened look of someone who makes his living out-of-doors, and he dresses in black cowboy boots, black jeans, and black T-shirts. In the evening, he adds a black cashmere jacket with a bit of red thread affixed to the lapel, which indicates that he is a chevalier in the French Legion of Honor. His hair is white and shaved short, except for a little ponytail that sprouts from the back of his head. On his left forearm is a crude tattoo of a blue butterfly, which he and his wife—Christina Oiticica, a painter, who designed it and has a matching one—got in 1980, as a "wedding ring." Christina, he says, is his last wife (he has had three others). He is superstitious—won't allow a dinner table of thirteen—and, in any other context, avoids using the word "last," which he finds morbid. His watch is new. He got it several weeks ago from the International Watch Company, which commissioned him to write seven short stories, one about each model the company produces. He took his fee in the form of a donation to the Paulo Coelho Institute, a foundation that helps children who live in the Pavão-Pavãozinho favela, in Rio. The assignment took a week.

One night in March, Coelho was in Paris, where he has an apartment in a 1925 building in the *seizième*, which he bought three years ago. The apartment is furnished sparsely but lusciously, as if a person with rococo tastes were

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half finished moving in: white leather couches, pillows with rose-in-bloom motifs, orange silk drapes, an antiqued mirror. In a *vaisselier* in the dining room sit a few lonely bottles of fine liqueur. Coelho and Christina have no children; their twenty-five-year-old niece, Paula, who works as their assistant, lives with them. Coelho also owns a converted mill in the French Pyrenees and an apartment on Copacabana Beach, in Rio. He spends a few months of the year in each place, and the rest of his time in transit. In the morning, he was leaving on a weeklong trip to Italy to promote his most recent novel, "The Witch of Portobello," while Christina and Paula spent a few days in the South of France. (The book will be published in the United States this month.)

Coelho sat at a glass-topped desk, going through e-mails on his computer, in an office where the shelves were mostly empty, except for a few books about Iraq and a thumbed deck of saints' cards, with St. Dismas, the patron saint of thieves, on top. On a Web site that leaves ample space for comments and conversation, Coelho maintains an unusually warm relationship with his readers. The site functions as a New Age chat room, where readers exchange ideas about prayer ("I am a muslim, but I am not practicing it! . . . I trust in god, but with globalisation it's hard to be stuck to religious principles!") and the spiritual path ("Has anyone seen 'The Secret'?").

Two weeks earlier, Coelho had been reading a page on the site devoted to "daily miracles," and had been moved to post an announcement of his own, inviting the first ten readers who responded to join him for a party in Spain on March 19th in celebration of the Feast of St. Joseph. "We are warriors who believe in dreams, miracles, omens," he wrote, explaining why he wanted to meet them. Later, he said, "The next day, I had a hundred requests. I had requests from Japan, I had requests from Catalonia, I had requests from South America, I had requests from North America, I had requests from Europe. They'll be very intimidated. They'll be very shy. People wait for six hours for me to sign a book." He felt guilty about the readers coming

from so far away—they would have to pay for their own transportation and hotel, and would get only a few hours in his company—but was determined to honor his pledge.

The illusion readers have that Coelho is talking directly to and about them is enhanced by the fact that he has often borrowed from their lives for his fiction. The central character in "The Witch of Portobello" is a Romanian Gypsy woman, adopted as a child by Lebanese Christians and living in London, who discovers supernatural powers through dance. Athena, as the character names herself, was inspired by an encounter Coelho had with a Romanian flight attendant who went to a talk he gave in Vienna several years ago. She dined with him afterward, and later travelled with him through Romania. The prostitute in "Eleven Minutes" also has a reader counterpart: she attended a signing of Coelho's in Geneva, and took him to the Rue de Berne, in the city's red-light district. He drew from her experiences, as well as from those of another prostitute, who specialized in S & M, to write the book.

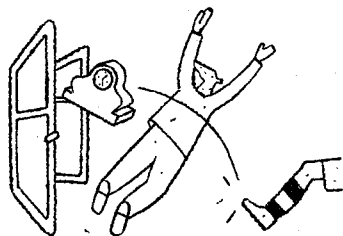
Sitting down in the living room and lighting a cigarette, Coelho mentioned another encounter that had yielded a novel. "In 2002, Christina and I had already money, as you can imagine. But we thought we should try to live only with the basics—a few clothes, a laptop for me. We moved to a two-star hotel in the Pyrenees. Christina Lamb came to interview me there." Lamb, a reporter for the London *Sunday Times*, went to see Coelho in August, 2003. She had just returned from Iraq, and during the interview, and in a few subsequent e-mails, she told him anecdotes from the field. A year later, she got an e-mail from Coelho that contained a first draft of "The Zahir," a novel about a man who goes on a journey of self-discovery after his war-correspondent wife leaves him for parts unknown,

along with a note saying that he had modelled the female character on her. "I was surprised and slightly taken aback, since we hadn't met since that first time in France," Lamb told me. The press speculated about the identity of his muse—an Italian actress, a Russian fashion designer, a Chilean former beauty queen—until a Portuguese newspaper outed Lamb.

"Later, I bought the *moulin*, the water mill," Coelho said. "But for two years we decided to live in this two-star hotel. It was a magical time." Paula and Christina came into the room, accompanied by a friend of Coelho's, a shaman visiting from the Amazon. "Sit down, sit down!" Coelho ordered. They sat. The shaman wore an eye-shaped amulet on a leather thong around his neck. He had come for the St. Joseph's party, and had brought a supply of *ayahuasca* from the rain forest. Coelho gave up drugs twenty-five years ago, but he encouraged everyone else to try.

"What is this?" Coelho said, suddenly noticing on the coffee table a D.H.L. package addressed to him. "Let me put a good vibration on it." His eyes open and glazed, he muttered something and touched his chin with his index finger. "South Africa," he said finally, cutting the package apart with a knife. Inside were ten copies of "The Alchemist," translated into Xhosa, and a request that he inscribe copies for Nelson Mandela, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki, Desmond Tutu, and several others. He opened another package, which contained the script for a Brazilian soap opera, "Eternal Magic," in which he'd agreed to play the reincarnation of the Celtic god Dagda. "Actor!" the shaman said, with a broad smile, and Coelho blushed.

Coelho said that in Milan, the first stop in Italy, he would meet a reader from a remote hamlet in northern Sweden—"the Swedish," he called her—with whom he had been corresponding for several weeks. "One month ago, I go to my public mailbox," he said. "There was a mail that was titled 'minus 33 degrees, alone, and sick,' so I said, 'What a title! Let me read this e-mail.' I discovered she's a lady. She's thirty-one years old. She has a sickness that nobody



can cure, something in the lungs. She asked if she could meet me. I said, 'Why not? I'm going to Italy, bring your exams, because I have a network of friends.' She can die at any moment. She's meeting us tomorrow. We're going to take her to Rome."

"Oh là là," Christina said.

"She is not a stranger," he said. "She knows my books, she knows my soul."

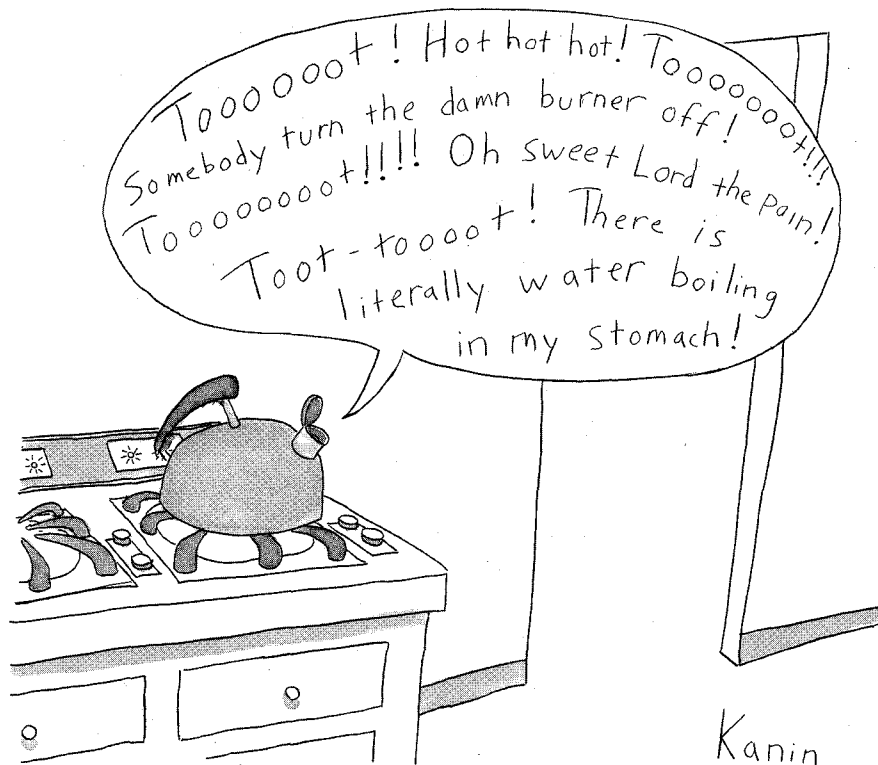
Dinner was served at a long table strewn with white rose petals and decorated with crystal candlesticks and butterfly napkin rings. Coelho started talking about his mill. "My village has two hundred people," he said. "Now an omnibus goes by and says, 'This is the house of Paulo Coelho.' One day there comes a girl—a woman, a woman!—from Ireland."

"Oh, wonderful, Ireland," the shaman said.

"She walked right onto my terrace, where I am sitting in the sun, and said, 'I came all the way here from Ireland because a satellite told me I should come here and commit suicide in front of you.' She was carrying a rucksack. I thought about John Lennon. She could pick up a gun and shoot me. I said, 'O.K., let's have a suicide, but first let's have a coffee.' Then she sat down and I stood up." He stood up, to demonstrate. "Now I could control her. I go inside and come back with coffee. I said, 'Listen. I have a way you can die without any pain. I'm a magician. You read 'The Pilgrimage'?"—Coelho's first book, published in Brazil in 1987, a memoir of walking seven hundred kilometres on El Camino, the ancient route of Catholic pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela, in northwestern Spain. "The Road to Santiago is fifty kilometres from here. Leave this house, walk—it'll take you three days—walk the road, and in three months, when you're finished, take the bus back here and I will teach you how to die without any pain.' I became the satellite; I started guiding her. I said, 'You have my blessing, so here is my phone number. Call me when you're ready.' She called me. She said, 'I changed my mind.' She never came back."

"What did you feel?" the shaman asked.

"Fear. And then I put in a gate." He circled his finger around the top of his



wineglass and said to Christina, "Do you remember her, in shorts, very good-looking?" Christina nodded.

A little time passed, and the shaman said, "Ugly women are bad luck."

Coelho was born in 1947, in Rio. His father was an engineer, and wanted him to be one, too; his mother was a devout Catholic, and Coelho was sent to a Jesuit school. He hoped to be a writer, and as a teen-ager started hanging out all day at the beach with a troublemaking crowd, the poet among toughs. His parents, believing he had gone crazy, sent him to a mental institution, where, in the course of three stays (he ran away twice), he was given electroshock therapy. In "Confessions of a Pilgrim," a book-length interview with the Spanish journalist Juan Arias, conducted in 1998, Coelho says that he recently discovered the medical report from his admission to the hospital. "I was surprised by the banality of the motivations. In the medical report, it says I was irritable, I harassed people politically, I was doing steadily worse in school, my mother thought I had sexual problems, I hadn't matured sufficiently for my age and when I wanted something I tried to get it by

every possible means, which revealed increasingly radical and extremist attitudes." In the late sixties, he drifted away from his family, became a hippie, did lots of drugs, and started a short-lived underground magazine called *2001*, which covered subjects like extraterrestrials and Jung. Researching a story, he came across the writings of the English occultist Aleister Crowley, and then joined the Alternative Society, a sect that advocated drugs and practiced black magic, and sought to embody Crowley's principle "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." He met a record producer and singer called Raul Seixas and began writing songs for him. He also initiated Seixas into the Alternative Society and introduced him to drugs.

In a few months, Seixas was a star, Coelho was rich, and together they were setting aside money to form a Brazilian version of the utopia that Crowley had established in Cefalù in the nineteen-twenties. "I wrote 'Gitâ,' and all of a sudden the whole of Brazil was singing it," Coelho said. "It was about the moment in the 'Bhagavad Gita' when Arjuna asks Krishna, 'Who are you?'" Roberto Menescal, a well-known bossa-nova musician, who, while work-

ing in A. & R. at Polygram, produced Coelho and Seixas's collaborations, remembers that they dressed in combat boots and military garb, kept their hair long, and always wore dark glasses. When their rock-and-roll anthem "Sociedade Alternativa" came out and kids all over Brazil were singing it—"Do what you want / because it's the whole / of the law, of the law / . . . Long live the Alternative Society / Long live the Alternative Society / The number 666 is Aleister Crowley"—the military dictatorship in Brazil decided it was subversive and arrested Coelho. He was released, and immediately kidnapped by paramilitaries, who accused him of being a guerrilla fighter; they held him for a week and, Coelho told Arias, tortured him by applying shocks to his genitals. After that, Coelho gave up religion for several years.

"I don't regret my experience with black magic, and, of course, it gives me a kind of aura—it's good for my biography," Coelho told me. But the only book he has ever destroyed was one about his two years in the sect. Christina asked him not to publish it. "This

is going to cause you a lot of damage," she said. "I got a sign from the Virgin." I deleted it from the computer and I threw the hard copy away in a waste bin in Rio de Janeiro. I don't like burning, because of the energy."

Coelho held various jobs in the music industry, wrote television biopics and soap operas, and travelled. In 1982, he and Christina went to Europe. They bought a Mercedes for a thousand dollars from the Indian Embassy in Yugoslavia, and drove it to Germany. They went to Dachau, and Coelho, terrified by what he saw there, had a vision of a man standing before him. Two months later, in Amsterdam, he saw what he took to be the same person, and approached him. This man, a Jewish businessman whom Coelho refers to in his writing as "J." and "my Master," inducted him into something he calls the Order of R.A.M. (Regnus Agnus Mundi), a society for the study of symbols. R.A.M. is surpassingly obscure—discounting the allusions Coelho makes to it—and has a curiously ungrammatical Latin name, though he says that it is part of

the Catholic Church, and that it is more than five hundred years old. (Efforts to verify its existence proved futile.) Not long after the encounter in Amsterdam, Coelho met J. in Norway, where, in a ritual beside three Viking ships, J. gave him a snake-shaped silver ring, which he wears to this day, on the fourth finger of his left hand.

Meeting J. marked Coelho's return to Catholicism, but not to the Jesuit variety of his youth—rather, to a syncretic, self-invented form, with plenty of room for hocus-pocus. "The Valkyries" contains a glimpse, from Christina's perspective, of life with an aspiring magician: "There were rituals, exercises, practices. There were long trips with J., with no defined date of return. There were long meetings with strange women, and men who had an aura of sensuality about them."

"The Pilgrimage" begins with a delightfully outlandish scene of a ceremony on a mountaintop in Brazil in which Coelho, accompanied by his master, his wife, and a "representative of the great fraternity that is comprised of esoteric orders from all over the world—the fraternity known as 'the Tradition'"—is about to be made a magus. He describes how he buried his old sword—"a great help to me during hundreds of magical operations"—and the Master placed a new one on the ground. "All of us spread our arms wide, and the Master, invoking his power, created a strange light that surrounded us." The Master pronounces Coelho, by the power and love of R.A.M., a Master and Knight of the Order, but when Coelho tries to take the sword his Master crushes his hand with his foot. By reaching for the sword, instead of refusing it and waiting for it to be given to him, he has shown that his heart is impure. The Master tasks him with walking the Road to Santiago; on the road, he says, Coelho will find his sword.

Along the way, a guide, Petrus, appears, and teaches Coelho R.A.M. exercises that will sharpen his intuition, conjure his personal devil, and inspire agape, or "the love that consumes." In the final pages of the book, Coelho discovers what he calls the "secret of my sword," and first entertains the notion of fulfilling his childhood ambi-



"That wasn't me, officer. That was the liquor driving."

tion to be a writer. Last year, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of his walk, he retraced his route by car. "On the second stop I said, 'Why don't I meet my readers?' I decided I'm going to do signings." He stopped in little towns all over northern Spain, and then kept going. "I travelled for three months, from southwestern France to Vladivostok to the World Cup. I called the signings a blitz. I didn't plan them. I was Easy Rider."

In Milan, Coelho met the Swedish—she had travelled seven hours to the airport in Stockholm to get a flight to Milan—and took her to his hotel. She was very tall and very thin, with blond hair down to her ribs. "Relax. Relax!" he told her, as he arranged with the concierge for a room for her in a nearby place she could afford.

That evening, Coelho had a cigarette outside the hotel. He was pensive; the Swedish seemed unwell—she spoke of constant fevers and severe bouts of pneumonia, but didn't seem motivated to discover their cause. He worried that it had been a mistake to invite her. "Some people don't want to be helped," he said resignedly. Then his mood changed abruptly. "I have a crazy idea. I think I'll do a signing here in Italy!" He anticipated the reaction of Elisabetta Sgarbi, his Italian publisher. "She will be hysterical," he said, gleefully. "I like to challenge her." A young woman from the publisher's press office arrived with a chauffeured car to take Coelho to be photographed with some local dignitaries at City Hall, before a dinner at the apartment of Letizia Moratti, the mayor of Milan, which had been organized by Sgarbi's brother, the city's culture minister. "What I'm thinking is that tomorrow I'll post on my blog that I'm here in Milan and I want to meet my readers," he said after he got in the car. The press officer eyed him nervously.

There was a risk that, on such short notice, only a few people would show up—a potential embarrassment for the publishing house. But Coelho has usually had the opposite problem. In 1998, in Zagreb, three or four thousand people came to get his autograph; one man brandished a gun and threatened to use it if he was denied. When Coe-

lho went to Tehran, in 2000, several hundred people met his plane in the middle of the night. Arash Hejazi, the editor of Caravan Books, Coelho's official Iranian publisher—he has at least twenty-seven unauthorized publishers—says that Coelho was the first non-Muslim writer to promote his work in that country since the revolution. He compares his reception to the one given Iran's national soccer team when it came back from winning the game against Australia that took the team to the World Cup. Five thousand people turned out for the signing, in one of the city's largest bookstores, and Coelho had to leave after only three or four books, because of the danger of a stampede. "Everything got out of control," Hejazi wrote in an e-mail. "When people saw Paulo, they rushed toward him, the bookstore was almost destroyed, and a woman fainted from the pressure." Coelho is also very popular in the Arab world. Karim Khayat, who publishes Coelho in North Africa and the Middle East, says "his style of writing translates beautifully into Arabic."

The car pulled up to Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, a grand nineteenth-century shopping arcade beside City Hall, and Coelho got out. He had spotted a Rizzoli bookstore. "I think I'll do the signing here," he said. "Let's go in and see it." He walked briskly inside and asked to see the manager on duty. "Perfetto," he said, when the stunned manager agreed to the event, two nights hence. "Where are my books? If I don't see my books, I'm not going to do a signing. You always have to check." The manager led him to a prominent display. Coelho picked up the Italian edition of "The Pilgrimage" and opened it to a random page. "Have you ever been in love?" he read aloud, pointing to the line and looking around significantly.

Later, walking to the Mayor's apartment, he passed two women on the street. "Did you hear them?" he said. "They were saying, 'It's him, it's him.' Yeah, it is. I am going to invite them." He backtracked to the corner where they were standing, and tried to tell them about the event at Rizzoli. They looked confounded but pleased, and a translator stepped in to clarify. Coelho

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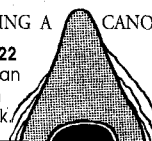
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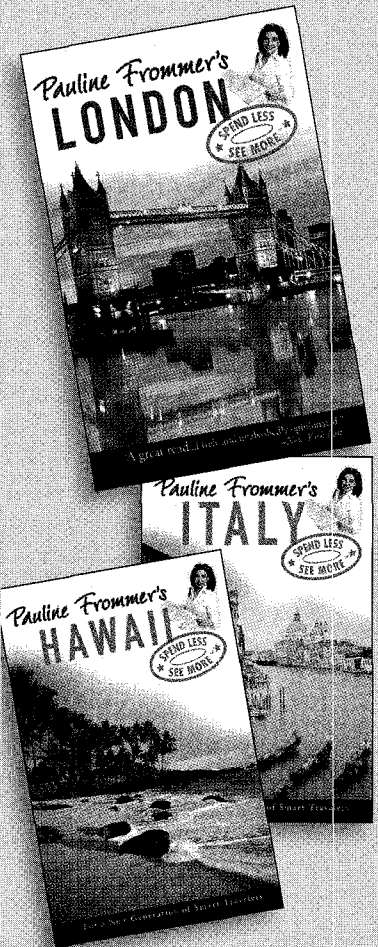
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had already moved on. By the end of the night, it was decided: the Swedish would not be coming along to Rome.

The night after the signing in Milan, there was another one in Rome. It was a warm, springlike Friday evening, and Coelho was concerned about attendance. He braced himself for disappointment, but, in spite of his anxiety, instructed a publicist to get him two large felt-tip pens, in black, for signing. He gives the pens away, like guitar picks, when they run dry.

The bookstore was long and narrow, hugging a curve in the Via Veneto. It was filled with hundreds of people, and more spilled out onto the street. When Coelho arrived, exactly on time, the crowd, holding up cameras, cell phones, and video cameras, applauded. "Patience, eh?" he said to laughter. As he made his way to the back of the room, where a desk had been set up, people called out, "Paulo, Paulo, Paulo!" Those outside knocked on the windows to try to make him look their way. There were white-haired ladies, men in business suits, women in cargo pants, parents with young teen-agers. "Maestro," they called him, one after the next. Coelho looked each reader in the eye, shook hands, signed his name in an exuberant swoop across the title page, and posed for a photograph. Many people brought more than one book; several brought photographs of themselves with him at past signings. An American girl—she looked to be on her junior year abroad—said breathlessly, "It's my goal to read every one of your books in a different language. So far I've read 'The Alchemist' in English, 'El Zahir' in *español*, and I'm working on 'Veronika' in Italian."

Coelho grew red with the heat, but was clearly enjoying himself. After an hour or so, a man in his mid-twenties came forward and showed Coelho his left triceps, where he had tattooed a phrase in Portuguese from one of his books: "Everything that had to happen did, and nothing happened." Another youth, his friend, stepped forward, and pulled up his shirtsleeve to show that he had the same tattoo. "This is a miracle, no?" Coelho said, hugging the second man, who was crying softly. "May God bless you." The two re-

mained outside the window, staring at Coelho and taking pictures, for a long time.

The desk was soon covered with devotional objects: a bunch of freesia, a bottle of red wine, a lotus candle from a young woman who instructed Coelho, "I used it one time, now you use it one time." (In Milan there had been manuscripts, a worn copy of the "I Ching," an origami crane.) A Bulgarian man with a shaved head said, "Thank you for writing 'The Alchemist.' The level of messages is on the level of the Bible."

With about fifty people left in line, Coelho stood up and went among them. "I'm going to sign all the books. Stay calm. Now I'm going to move toward you," he said, and disappeared into their embrace.

Whenever Coelho travels, even by car, he says a prayer that he will meet interesting people—"people who will protect me, help me in my work." On the runway in Rome, before the flight to Pamplona, the airport nearest Puente la Reina, where the St. Joseph's party would be held, he said, "The most famous witch of El Camino, Jesús Jato, is coming from Villafranca del Bierzo, six hundred kilometres away." Jato has a shelter on the road, where pilgrims can spend the night for free. "He arrived today. He is the classic witch, sorcerer, call it what you will." The plane began to move, and from underneath his black T-shirt Coelho took out a chain heavy with medallions: St. Joseph, St. Teresa, St. George, St. Michael. ("The Warriors of Light, as I see all these angels who fight," he said. "I hate crosses. I hate sacrifice.") He clutched the medallions in his right fist and brought the fist to his mouth. He pointed his index finger out the window at the sky. His eyes took on the glazed look; his lip trembled with an interior monologue.

Over the Pyrenees, near Lourdes, Coelho looked out the window. "There is a mountain without any snow on it that is sacred to me from my second pilgrimage, the Road to Rome," he said. "The Road to Rome is about the feminine side. The Road to Santiago is masculine—it's about logic, discipline. For the Road to Rome you spend seventy days in a place—any place—and I chose

here. That was in '89. At the beginning, the pilgrimage seems like such a stupid idea. After you get used to it, you get attached. When I reached Compostela, at the end of the Road to Santiago, I thought, What am I going to do with my life? That's when I made the decision to burn all my bridges and become a writer."

When Coelho landed in Pamplona, Christina and Paula were waiting for him. He drove toward Puente la Reina, where pilgrims' routes from all over Europe converge. In "The Pilgrimage" he describes walking into the town and seeing "a statue of a pilgrim in medieval garb: three-cornered hat, cape, scallop shells, and in his hand a shepherd's crook with a gourd—a memorial to the epic journey, now almost forgotten, that Petrus and I were reliving." Driving, he got lost, and used the car's built-in G.P.S.

The next afternoon, at a small hotel where many of the party guests were staying, the proprietor greeted Coelho. "Your books are very good for me and for my business," he said. "As Hemingway was for San Fermín, you are for the pilgrimage!" (The running of the bulls in Pamplona takes place during the Feast of San Fermín.) "This comparison with Hemingway, I'm very glad to hear it," Coelho said. Earlier, he had remarked, "When I did the pilgrimage, they had four hundred pilgrims a year. Now they have four hundred a day."

By the night of the party, held at an elegant hotel called El Peregrino, the ten readers invited by Coelho had all arrived. There was Marie, an Air Force veteran and now a civilian contractor on the U.S. base in Qatar; Chieko, who, travelling alone for the first time at the age of thirty, had taken a twenty-hour flight from Osaka; and Alex, a thirty-one-year-old woman from Staffordshire. "I probably needed to go to counselling, but I read his books instead," Alex said. She credited Coelho with her successful tutu-making business. "He gave me the courage to believe in myself. I would never have had the confidence. He says, 'Miracles happen,' and they do."

Coelho had slept all day in preparation, and he was in a joyous mood. He sat at a table, with large candelabra, receiving people and presents, and sign-

ing books. Outside, snow came down in thick wet flakes. "Look at the snow," he said. "Only a magician could make this snow."

A hearty paella was served at ten, and afterward Jesús Jato, the witch, went to the front of the room and began making preparations over an ancient rusty cast-iron tripod cauldron. Beside him were a pound of sugar, a cup of coffee beans, a Granny Smith, and a flagon of fifty-five-proof grappa. He was making a *queimada*: a punch that he would set on fire, while saying prayers for the assembled and a spell to ward off bad spirits. Jato had few teeth, broad hands, and bushy gray eyebrows, and wore jeans and a lumberjack shirt.

Coelho dinged his glass. "Now begins the classic ritual of the *queimada*," he said. "Jesús is one of the emblematic figures of the Road to Santiago. We are going to gather round, and he is going to make a kind of exorcism. The only thing you have to do is say 'Oooooooo!'" Just then, a cell phone rang in Jato's pocket, and he answered it. "He's a new kind of witch," Coelho said.

Jato lit the pot and raised an *Oooooooo!* from the guests. He poured the sugar in, and the smell of burning filled the room. "For the people who didn't lose their way but found a new way!" he said.

Oooooooo! the guests said, throwing their arms in the air.

He added a fistful of coffee beans. "For the pilgrims who said they walked forty kilometres and it's not true!"

Oooooooo!

He skinned the apple, and the coil slipped in. "For the pilgrims who have blisters!"

Oooooooo!

"For the witches!"

Oooooooo!

"For the pilgrim Paulo Coelho!"

Oooooooo!

Coelho said, "For all the pilgrims that are friends of Paulo Coelho!"

Oooooooo!

Jato raised the flame-engulfed ladle and let the stream of alcohol, shimmering, almost silver, fall into the kettle. He passed the flaming ladle around. Coelho dipped his index finger into the center, held it up, glowing, for a moment, and popped it in his mouth. ♦

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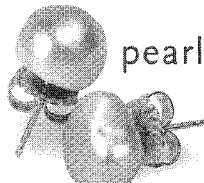


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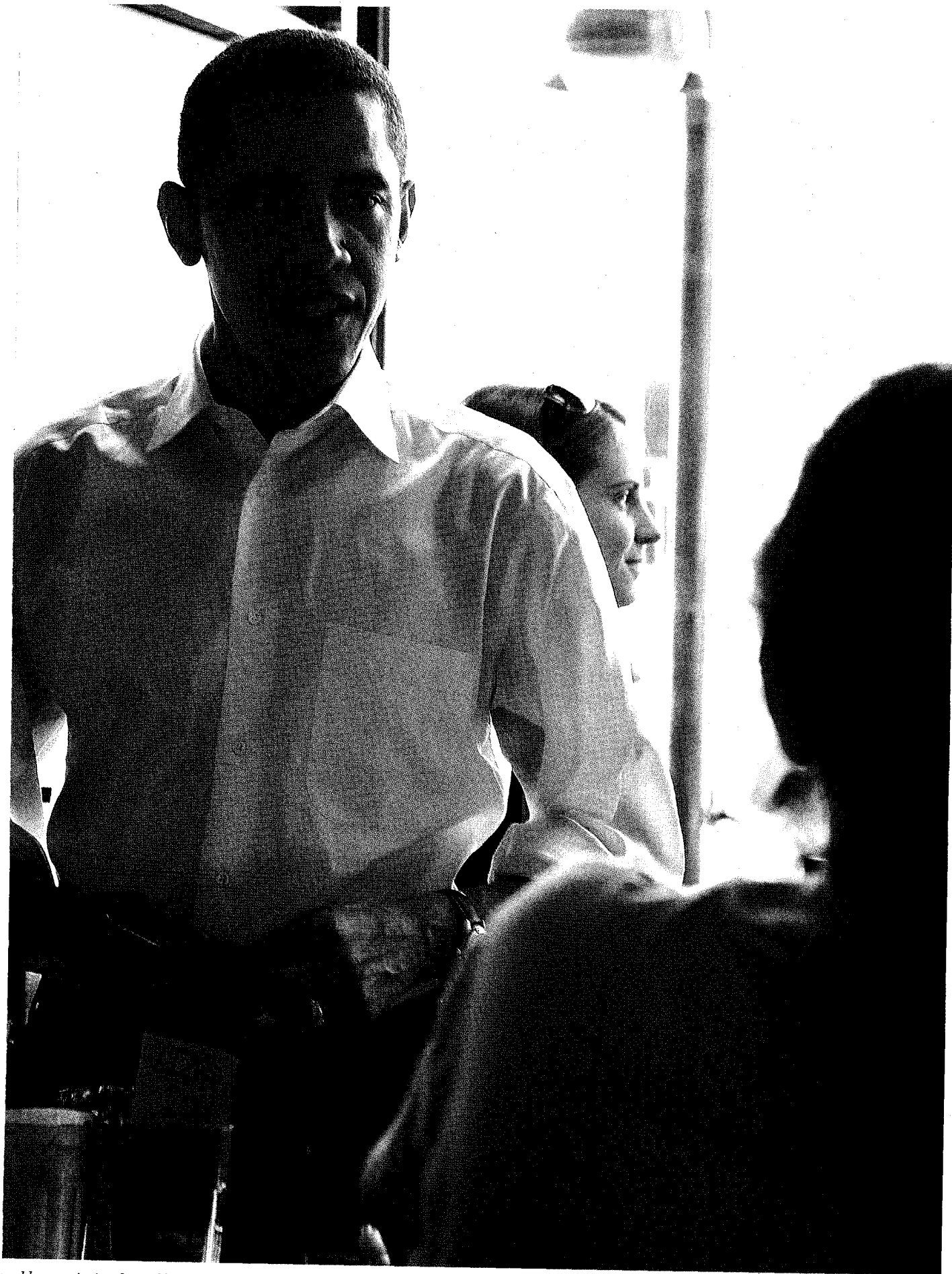
THE CONCILIATOR

Where is Barack Obama coming from?

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR



Obama campaigning in Iowa City. He has staked his candidacy on union—on bringing together two halves of America that are profoundly divided.



and by associating himself with Lincoln—and he knows what both of those things mean. Photograph by Samantha Appleton.

Begin in farm country, late last summer, no particular day. Carmi, Illinois—a town on the Little Wabash River, down in the southern tip of the state, twenty-five miles from Kentucky, population about fifty-five hundred. A group of twelve farmers—burly white men with ruddy complexions and very short hair—sitting around a rectangle of pushed-together tables in a nondescript room, talking with their junior senator, Barack Obama. It was long before Obama decided to run for President, and he wasn't in a rush. He sat at one end of the tables, leaning back in his chair, his knee propped against the table edge. He wore a tie but had removed his jacket and rolled up his shirtsleeves. A young farmer complained about the Jones Act, a 1920 law that he felt was partly responsible for a detrimental consolidation in the barge market. Another farmer had a question about ethanol.

"My question first arose in my mind during the State of the Union address," the farmer said. "President Bush said I'm all for biofuels, and then he started talking about switchgrass. And I'm, like, now wait a minute, we've got a system where we can make ethanol out of corn. I guess cellulosic ethanol"—which can be made from switchgrass—"is more efficient.

But we don't know how to do it, and we don't know if farmers are ever going to grow switchgrass, and we don't know if we would even want to grow switchgrass, so why so much emphasis on cellulosic ethanol?"

"Well, I'm not a scientist," Obama said, in a leisurely way, "so I gotta be careful when I start getting into this stuff that I don't wade too deep and then can't get back to shore. Right now cellulosic ethanol is potentially eight times more energy-efficient than corn-based ethanol, because you eliminate the middle step of converting it into sugar before you convert it into ethanol. That's my understanding. I know you're attached to corn, but if somebody came to you and said, you know what, if you take half your fields and grow switchgrass you'll make the same amount of money or more, then—"

"Not really," the farmer interjected. "Because I had a guy come to me before wheat harvest and said do you wanna sell your straw and I said no. I said, 'Don't even talk to me, I don't wanna sell my straw.'"

"Now that's interesting," Obama said. "Why wouldn't you want to sell your straw?"

"Organic matter!" the farmer said, triumphantly.

"Well, but if it's economical to you, if it's a good business decision, you'll be interested."

"If you paid me enough," the farmer conceded.

"If you were paid enough. Now, you know the economics of it better than I do. So we've got to sit down with farmers who are growing the crops and figure out what would make sense. Because, look, I'm not a farmer, and what you just described, I want to keep my straw because it's important, uh—"

"I thought I was the only person who had this idea," the farmer broke in, "and then in *FarmWeek* the guest editorial he said wait a minute, he said what we're talking about is against everything we've preached for the last twenty or thirty years, where we return organic matter to the soil."

"Exactly," Obama said in a soothing tone.

"And all of a sudden we're talking about denuding the ground—"

"Which we shouldn't do. And so," he said, returning to the topic, "the way to think about this is not to impose ideas on farmers that aren't gonna work, by people who don't farm. But we have to create more efficient ethanol if we want to see a significant growth in the market. The fact of the matter is that Brazilian ethanol is substantially cheaper than U.S. ethanol. Now, George Bush wanted to go ahead and let that come in, and myself and Durbin"—Richard Durbin, Illinois's senior senator—"said no, we would continue to support the existing tariff so that we can have the development of a home-grown ethanol market. I want to make sure that whatever is being done is utilizing the fact that we've got some of the richest soil on earth and the best farmers on earth. But the flip side is that farmers need to be engaged and not just put out a hand and say I'm not interested because I'm used to growing corn and beans."

There are three things that Democratic political candidates tend to do when talking with constituents: they display an impressive grasp of the minutiae of their constituents' problems, particularly money problems; they rouse indignation by explaining how those problems are caused by powerful groups getting rich on the backs of ordinary people; and they present well-worked-out policy proposals that, if passed, would solve the problems and put



"You raised it from a mutant seed, you whack it."

the powerful groups in their place. Obama seldom does any of these things. He tends to underplay his knowledge, acting less informed than he is. He rarely accuses, preferring to talk about problems in the passive voice, as things that are amiss with us rather than as wrongs that have been perpetrated by them. And the solutions he offers generally sound small and local rather than deep-reaching and systemic. Take a recent forum in Las Vegas on health care. Here are Hillary Clinton and Obama speaking about the same subject, preventive care.

"We have to change the way we finance health care, and that's going to mean taking money away from people who make out really well right now, so this is going to be a big political battle," Clinton said. "The insurance companies make money by employing a lot of people to try to avoid insuring you and then, if you're insured, to try to avoid paying for the health care you received." She stood at the front of the stage, declining an invitation to sit down next to the moderator. She spoke energetically but composedly, conveying the impression that she had spent a great deal of time preparing for the event because it was extremely important to her. "A lot of insurance companies will not pay for someone who's pre-diabetic or been diagnosed with diabetes to go to a nutritionist to find out how better to feed themselves, or to go to a podiatrist to have their feet checked," she said. "The insurance companies will tell you this: they don't want to pay for preventive health care because that's like lost money because they're not sure that the patient will still be with them. But if they're confronted with the doctor saying we're going to have to amputate the foot they're stuck with it. That is upside down and backwards!"

Now here is Obama. "We've got to put more money in prevention," he said. "It makes no sense for children to be going to the emergency room for treatable ailments like asthma. Twenty per cent of our patients who have chronic illnesses account for eighty per cent of the costs, so it's absolutely critical that we invest in managing those with chronic illnesses like diabetes. If we hire a case manager to work with them to insure that they're taking the proper treatments, then potentially we're not going to have to spend thirty thousand dollars on a leg amputation." A young man asked about

health care for minorities. "Obesity and diabetes in minority communities are more severe," Obama said, "so I think we need targeted programs, particularly to children in those communities, to make sure that they've got sound nutrition, that they have access to fruits and vegetables and not just Popeyes, and that they have decent spaces to play in instead of being cooped up in the house all day."

In the past couple of months, Obama has hosted health-care forums of his own—in New Hampshire, in Iowa. In these forums, he is tranquil and relaxed, as though on a power-conserve setting. He paces slowly, he revolves, he tilts his head. He comments in a neutral, detached way. He doesn't express sympathy for sickness, or scorn for bureaucracy, or outrage at unfairness. He says that the system is broken and needs to be fixed, but conveys no particular urgency.

This mode of his is often called professorial, and Obama himself likens these forums to the constitutional-law classes that he taught at the University of Chicago. But "professorial" implies that he seems cerebral or didactic, and he doesn't. Despite the criticism he has received for being all inspiration and no policy, Obama has so far stuck to what appears to be an instinct that white papers belong on Web sites, not in speeches. It is surprising, given the recent electoral record of Democratic policy wonks, that he is not given more credit for the astuteness of this approach, but it's true that it's not just strategy—it's who he is. "He doesn't have the handicap that a lot of smart people have, which is that they come across as 'You're not smart enough to talk to me,'" George Haywood, a private investor and a friend of Obama's, says. "Adlai Stevenson, another Illinois guy, had that—he came across as an egghead and it was off-putting to people. Barack is the opposite." Probably one of the reasons for this is that Obama seems not to attach much value to cleverness as such. Even in law school, perhaps the place more than any other where sheer cleverness is prized and love of argument for its own sake is fundamental to the culture, he was not much interested in academic jousting.

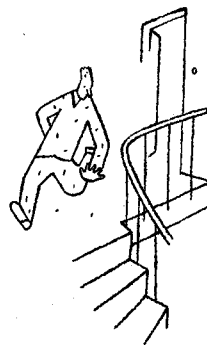
No, Obama's detachment, his calm, in such small venues, is less professorial

than medical—like that of a doctor who, by listening to a patient's story without emotional reaction, reassures the patient that the symptoms are familiar to him. It is also doctorly in the sense that Obama thinks about the body politic as a whole thing. If you are presenting a problem as something that they have perpetrated on us, then whipping up outrage is natural enough; but if you take unity seriously,

as Obama does, then outrage does not make sense, any more than it would make sense for a doctor to express outrage that a patient's kidney is causing pain in his back. There is also, of course, a racial aspect to this. "If you're a black male, you don't have to try hard to impress people with your aggression," Haywood says. "There was a period

when black politicians started to be successful, and it was understood that if you wanted to be mainstream you'd better have gray hair. Doug Wilder was an example. David Dinkins. Mayor Bradley in L.A. To be popular with the broader white electorate, you'd better look safe, you'd better not look angry. Now, I don't think Barack made a conscious decision to come across this way, but it is a happy accident. Some people may have seen his speech at the Democratic Convention, or heard that he rocked the house, and they may be disappointed, but the mainstream is not ready for a fire-breathing black man." (It seems likely that, consciously or not, Obama has learned from these examples, and knows that the election of a President Obama wouldn't mean a revolution in race relations, any more than women prime ministers were a sign of flourishing feminism in South Asia. Bigotry has always made exceptions.)

Obama's calm is also a matter of temperament. The first thing almost everybody who knows Obama says about him is how extremely comfortable he is with himself. "He was almost freakishly self-possessed and centered," Christopher Edley, Jr., one of Obama's professors at Harvard Law School, who is now a dean at Berkeley, says. There is something freakish about Obama's self-possession—it's conspicuous, it draws attention to itself, like the unnatural stillness of someone able to lower his blood pressure at will. He doesn't strive for an Everyman quality: he is relaxed but never chummy,



gracious rather than familiar. His surface is so smooth, his movements so easy and fluid, his voice so consistent and well-pitched that he can seem like an actor playing a politician, too implausibly effortless to be doing it for real. Obama has become known for his open-necked shirts—he may do to the tie what John Kennedy did to the hat—but he never looks casual. “Gore and Bush both have this jokey quality, and I’ve never seen that in Obama,” Robert Putnam, a Harvard political scientist who has spent time with all three politicians, says. “It’s not like he’s a sobersides, but Bush can be goofy, Gore can be goofy, Obama is not goofy.”

What’s strange about this is that the serene man his friends describe could not be more different from the person Obama himself describes in his memoir, “Dreams from My Father.” In that book, the young Obama is confused and angry, struggling to figure out who he is, often high, wary of both white condescension and black rage, never trusting himself, always suspicious that his beliefs are just disguised egotism, his emotions just symptoms of his peculiar racial lot. Of course, the book is about his emergence from this state of mind—it’s a traditional tale of self-finding which ends, traditionally, with a wedding, in which his confusions are resolved—but the contrast between the Obama of the book and the Obama visible to the world is nonetheless so extreme as to be striking. “He was grounded, comfortable in his own skin, knew who he was, where he came from, why he believed things,” Kenneth Mack, a friend of Obama’s from Harvard and now a professor there, says. “When I read the book, I was surprised—the confusion and the anger that he described, maybe they were there below the surface, but they were not manifest at all.” Asked about this, Obama says, “You know, what puzzles me is why people are puzzled by that. That angry character lasts from the time I was fifteen to the time I was twenty-one or so. I guess my explanation is I was an adolescent male with a lot of hormones and an admittedly complicated upbringing. But that wasn’t my natural temperament. And the book doesn’t describe my entire life. I could have written an entirely different book, about the joys of basket-

ball and what it’s like to bodysurf as the sun’s going down on a sandy beach.”

Why didn’t he write a book about the joys of basketball? Why focus on an aspect of himself that seems so politically unpalatable? When Obama was in law school, just before he wrote “Dreams,” he talked about wanting to be mayor of Chicago, and since people tend for some reason to tolerate—indeed, to delight in—considerably more eccentricity and dubious conduct in mayors than they do in other elected officials, it may be that he wrote the book with that ambition in mind. He probably realized that revealing his druggy past was the best way to defuse the issue in the future. But Obama is a master storyteller, and it’s likely that he also knows that the typical story of the political candidate—doing very well in school, followed by doing very well in a profession, meanwhile relishing a good life (victory, revenge, nice house, basketball, whatever)—is not moving or inspiring stuff.

When he was working as a community organizer in Chicago, Obama spoke to a number of black ministers, trying to persuade them to ally themselves with his organization, and in the course of these conversations he discovered that most had something in common. “One minister talked about a former gambling addiction,” he writes. “Another told me about his years as a successful executive and a secret drunk. They all mentioned periods of religious doubt . . . the striking bottom and shattering of pride; and then finally the resurrection of self, a self alloyed to something larger. That was the source of their confidence, they insisted: their personal fall, their subsequent redemption. It was what gave them the authority to preach the Good News.” Cassandra Butts, a friend of Obama’s from law school, remembers, “Barack used to say that one of his favorite sayings of the civil-rights movement was ‘If you cannot bear the cross, you can’t wear the crown.’”

Obama rose to prominence at the 2004 Democratic Convention, describing his life as a celebration of the American dream: a “skinny kid with a funny name,” the product of an improbably idealistic union between an African man and a girl from Kansas, he rose out

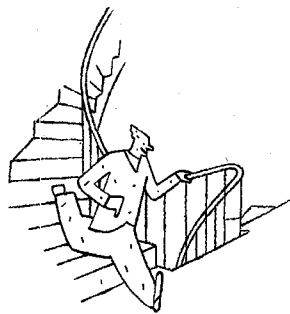
of obscurity to attend Harvard Law School and would go on—it was by then clear—to become the third black U.S. senator since Reconstruction. But in another sense his life runs directly counter to the American dream, rejecting the American dreams of his parents and grandparents, in search of something older.

Obama’s maternal grandfather, Stanley Dunham, grew up a small-time delinquent in El Dorado, Kansas. He didn’t know what he wanted to do with himself, but he knew that he wanted to get out of Kansas—out of his parents’ house, away from the airless parochialism of the small-town Midwest, where, as his grandson imagined it, “fear and lack of imagination choke your dreams so that you already know on the day that you’re born just where you’ll die and who it is that’ll bury you.” After a few false starts and eloping with a restless girl, he did what men of his type iconically do: he moved west. He moved to California, then to Seattle, and then, finally, to the last frontier, as far west as he could go without ending up east again, to Hawaii.

From a starting point eight thousand miles farther east, in Kenya, Obama’s other grandfather, Hussein Onyango, moved in the same direction for similar reasons. Discontented and ambitious, he left his father’s village, curious about the new white people settling in a nearby town. He took to wearing European clothing and adopted European notions about hygiene and property with a convert’s fervor. During the Second World War, he travelled to Europe as a cook for the British Army.

The children of these two men, Obama’s parents, one generation removed from their native places, were freer than their fathers. Obama’s mother, Ann, married first a man from Kenya and then, when that man left, a man from Indonesia, and when the second marriage fell apart, she briefly returned home to Hawaii to start a master’s in anthropology, and then left again for Indonesia, to spend several years doing field work. She gave her son, then thirteen, the choice whether to come with her or stay behind at his school in Hawaii, and he chose to stay.

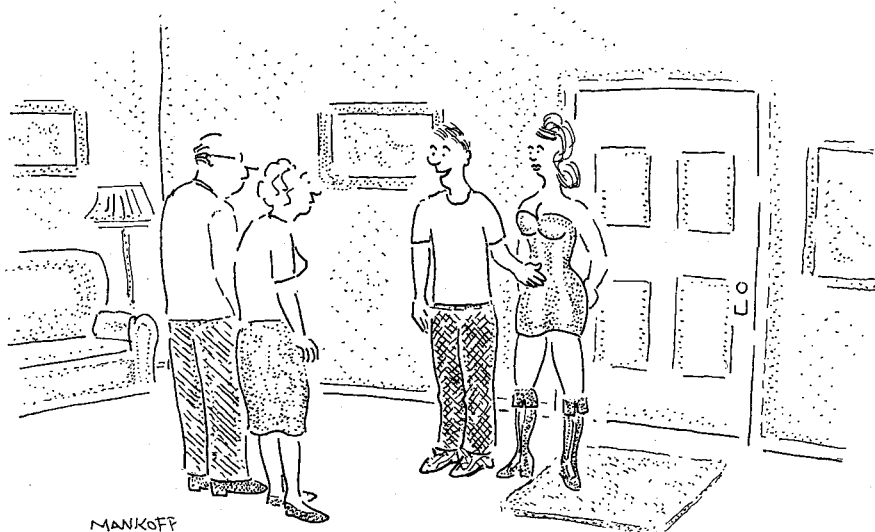
Obama’s father was expelled from school, and his father cut him off, but he managed to obtain a scholarship to attend college in America. He left his pregnant wife and his son to study econometrics at



the University of Hawaii. There he met Ann Dunham, married her, and had another child, Barack. He left his second family to return to Kenya to work for the government, where he married another American woman and had two more children with her. After a few years, this third family disintegrated, and, because he was unwilling to accept the unfairness of Kenya's persistent tribalism, so did his government position. Angry and penniless, he started to drink.

"What strikes me most when I think about the story of my family," Obama writes, "is a running strain of innocence, an innocence that seems unimaginable, even by the measures of childhood." Innocence is not, for him, a good quality, or even a redeeming excuse: it is not the opposite of guilt but the opposite of wisdom. In Obama's description of his maternal grandfather, for instance, there is love but also contempt. "His was an American character, one typical of men of his generation, men who embraced the notion of freedom and individualism and the open road without always knowing its price," Obama writes. "Men who were both dangerous and promising precisely because of their fundamental innocence; men prone, in the end, to disappointment." Stanley Dunham's restlessness didn't get him anywhere but far away. He ended up an incompetent, unhappy insurance salesman, his life not very different from the one he might have lived if he'd stayed in Kansas, except that, having travelled all that distance to end up there, he was all the more dissatisfied with it. His daughter saw his dissatisfaction but learned the wrong lesson: the trouble wasn't that he had wandered in a meaningless fashion, wandering for wandering's sake, expecting that a new place meant a new life; the trouble was that he hadn't wandered far enough. She would go farther. "It was this desire of his to obliterate the past, this confidence in the possibility of making the world from whole cloth," Obama writes, "that proved to be his most lasting patrimony."

Obama's mother is, in his portrayal, an American innocent out of Henry James: a young girl who ventures into the world believing that things are as they seem to be; that a person's story begins when she is born and her relations with other people begin when she meets them; that you can leave your home without fear of injury or loneliness because people everywhere are



MANKOFF

"Mom, Dad, this is my friend Cindy. Cindy is a sex worker."

more or less alike. She had no idea what she was getting into when she left Hawaii—no idea that only months before she arrived Indonesia had suffered a failed but brutal coup and the killing of several hundred thousand people. Eventually, somebody told her what had happened, but the knowledge didn't change her. "In a land where fatalism remained a necessary tool for enduring hardship," Obama writes, "she was a lonely witness for secular humanism, a soldier for New Deal, Peace Corps, position-paper liberalism." She had a faith, inherited from her father and resistant to experience, "that rational, thoughtful people could shape their own destiny." She should have counted herself lucky for emerging from the experience with only a second divorce and two bewildered children. "Things could have turned out worse," her son wrote. "Much worse."

Innocence, freedom, individualism, mobility—the belief that you can leave a constricting or violent history behind and remake yourself in a new form of your choosing—all are part of the American dream of moving west, first from the old country to America, then from the crowded cities of the East Coast to the open central plains and on to the Pacific. But this dream, to Obama, seems credulous and shallow, a destructive craving for weightlessness. When Obama, as a young man, went to Kenya for the first time and learned how his father's life had turned out—how he had destroyed his career by imagining that old tribalisms were just

pettiness, with the arrogant idea that he could rise above the past and change his society by sheer force of belief—Obama's aunt told him that his father had never understood that, as she put it, "if everyone is family, no one is family." Obama found this striking enough so that he repeated it later on, in italics: *If everyone is family, no one is family.* Universalism is a delusion. Freedom is really just abandonment. You might start by throwing off religion, then your parents, your town, your people and your way of life, and when, later on, you end up leaving your wife or husband and your child, too, it seems only a natural progression.

So when it came time for Obama to leave home he reversed what his mother and father and grandparents had done: he turned around and moved east. First back to the mainland, spending two years of college in California, then farther, to New York. He ended up in Chicago, back in the Midwest, from which his mother's parents had fled, embracing everything they had escaped—the constriction of tradition, the weight of history, the provincial smallness of community, settling for your whole life in one place with one group of people. He embraced even the dirt, the violence, and the narrowness that came with that place, because they were part of its memory. He thought about the great black migration to Chicago from the South, nearly a century before, and the traditions the migrants had made there. "I made a chain

between my life and the faces I saw, borrowing other people's memories," he wrote. He wanted to be bound.

Of course, in a sense, by choosing to leave his family and move to a place to which he had no connection, he was doing exactly what his parents had done, but, unlike them, he decided to believe that his choosing self had been shaped by fate and family. There was, at least, something organic, something inescapable about that. "I can see that my choices were never truly mine alone," he wrote, "and that is how it should be, that to assert otherwise is to chase after a sorry sort of freedom." Choosing was the best that he could do. In time, the roots would grow. He married Michelle Robinson, a woman who already owned the memories and the roots, who was by birth the person he was trying to become: the child of an intact, religious black family from the South Side. He took a job organizing a South Side community that was disintegrating but that he hoped, through work and inspiration, to revive. Later, rejecting the agnosticism of his parents and his own skeptical instincts, he became a Christian and joined a church. "I came to realize," he wrote in his second book, "The Audacity of Hope," that

"without an unequivocal commitment to a particular community of faith, I would be consigned at some level to always remain apart, free in the way that my mother was free, but also alone in the same ways that she was ultimately alone."

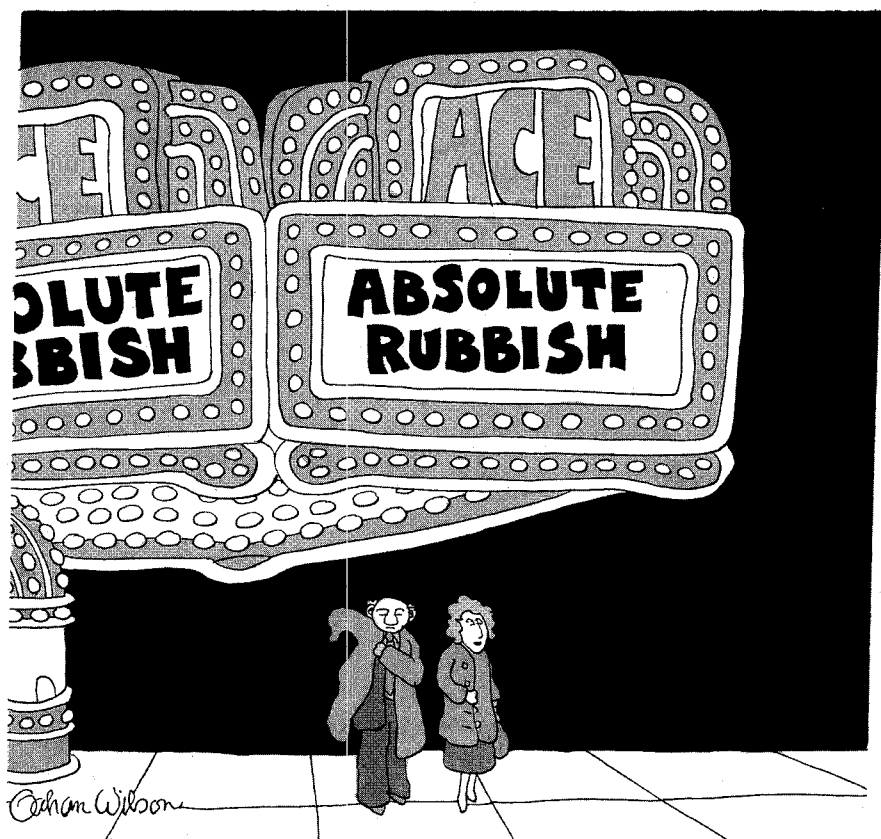
By the time he arrived at law school, when he was twenty-seven, he had become the man he had imagined. All his life, people had considered him black because he looked black, however confused he might be inside, and now he was no longer confused. His conversion was complete. "If you had met him, you would never get that he was biracial," Kenneth Mack says. "You would never get that he grew up in Hawaii. When I met him, he just seemed like a black guy from Chicago. He seemed like a Midwestern black man."

The victory of freedom over history is not just, of course, an American story about individuals but also a story that America tells about itself. Obama rejects this story even in one of its most persuasive incarnations, the civil-rights movement. He calls the "spirit that would grip the nation for that fleeting period between Kennedy's election and the passage of the

Voting Rights Act: the seeming triumph of universalism over parochialism and narrow-mindedness" a "useful fiction, one that haunts me . . . evoking as it does some lost Eden." When it seems that history has been defeated, that is only an illusion produced by charisma and rhetoric.

It is, then, not surprising that when it was proposed that America should invade Iraq with the goal of establishing democracy there, Obama knew that it would be a terrible mistake. This was American innocence at its most destructive, freedom at its most deceptive, universalism at its most naïve. "There was a dangerous innocence to thinking that we would be greeted as liberators, or that with a little bit of economic assistance and democratic training you'd have a Jeffersonian democracy blooming in the desert," he says now. "There is a running thread in American history of idealism that can express itself powerfully and appropriately, as it did after World War II with the creation of the United Nations and the Marshall Plan, when we recognized that our security and prosperity depend on the security and prosperity of others. But the same idealism can express itself in a sense that we can remake the world any way we want by flipping a switch, because we're technologically superior or we're wealthier or we're morally superior. And when our idealism spills into that kind of naïveté and an unwillingness to acknowledge history and the weight of other cultures, then we get ourselves into trouble, as we did in Vietnam."

In his view of history, in his respect for tradition, in his skepticism that the world can be changed any way but very, very slowly, Obama is deeply conservative. There are moments when he sounds almost Burkean. He distrusts abstractions, generalizations, extrapolations, projections. It's not just that he thinks revolutions are unlikely: he values continuity and stability for their own sake, sometimes even more than he values change for the good. Take health care, for example. "If you're starting from scratch," he says, "then a single-payer system"—a government-managed system like Canada's, which disconnects health insurance from employment—"would probably make sense. But we've got all these legacy systems in place, and managing the transition, as well as adjusting the culture to a different system, would be difficult to pull



"Well, you can't say they didn't warn us."

off. So we may need a system that's not so disruptive that people feel like suddenly what they've known for most of their lives is thrown by the wayside."

Obama's voting record is one of the most liberal in the Senate, but he has always appealed to Republicans, perhaps because he speaks about liberal goals in conservative language. When he talks about poverty, he tends not to talk about gorging plutocrats and unjust tax breaks; he says that we are our brother's keeper, that caring for the poor is one of our traditions. Asked whether he has changed his mind about anything in the past twenty years, he says, "I'm probably more humble now about the speed with which government programs can solve every problem. For example, I think the impact of parents and communities is at least as significant as the amount of money that's put into education." Obama encourages his crossover appeal. He doesn't often criticize the Bush Administration directly; in New Hampshire recently, he told his audience, "I'm a Democrat. I'm considered a progressive Democrat. But if a Republican or a Conservative or a libertarian or a free-marketer has a better idea, I am happy to steal ideas from anybody and in that sense I'm agnostic." "The number of conservatives who've called me—roommates of mine, relatives who are Republicans—who've said, 'He's the one Democrat I could support, not because he agrees with me, because he doesn't, but because I at least think he'll take my point of view into account,'" Michael Froman, a law-school friend who worked in the Clinton Administration and is now involved in Obama's campaign, says. "That's a big thing, mainstream Americans feeling like Northeast liberals look down on them."

After Obama's Convention speech, Republican bloggers rushed to claim him, under headings such as "Right Speech, Wrong Convention" and "Barack Obama: A Republican Soul Trapped Inside a Democrat's Body." The Convention speech was uncharacteristically Reaganesque for Obama, being almost uniformly sunny about America, which he called a "magical place"; these days, he tends to be more sombre. Even so, Republicans continue to find him congenial, especially those who opposed the war on much the same conservative grounds that he did. Some of Bush's top fund-raisers are contributing to Obama's campaign. In his

election to the U.S. Senate, Obama won forty per cent of the Republican vote; now there is a group called Republicans for Obama, founded by John Martin, a law student and Navy reservist shortly to be posted to Afghanistan, which has chapters in six states. (On its Web site, the group highlights aspects of Obama's biography that aren't usually emphasized, referring to his mother's second husband as an "Indonesian oil manager," and mentioning the year after college that Obama spent working at Business International Corporation.) Of course, not all Republicans like Obama—John Martin receives a steady stream of rude e-mails. "Hi John, Just wanted to let you know that there aren't Republicans for Obama Hussein Barack," one woman wrote. "Please remove me from your mailing list and get over your white guilt." "Some Republicans you scum are!" a man from Hobe Sound, Florida, wrote. "This is someone who has a 100% left wing voting record in the Senate, including rejection of Roberts and Alito and wants to repeal our tax cuts. Screw him! And screw you too!"

In the most widely quoted part of his Convention speech, Obama said, "The pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too. We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around in our libraries in the Red States." Seasoned observers of Washington tend to dismiss such talk of national unity and bipartisan coöperation as meaningless political boilerplate. Even Obama's allies worry that it sounds a little flaccid. "So much of what he's said he'll do when he's President is about being conciliatory and bipartisan and really listening," a friend says. "All this process-oriented stuff that's not exactly Churchillian rhetoric." But, coming from Obama, the talk about unity isn't boilerplate—he actually means it, and it's substantive, which is to say that it has consequences that make people angry.

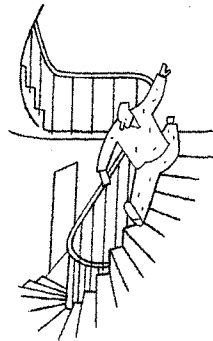
Obama is always disappointing people who feel that he gives too much respect or yields too much ground to the other side, rather than fighting aggressively for his principles. "In law school,

we had a seminar together and Charles Fried, who is very conservative, was one of our speakers," Cassandra Butts says. "The issue of the Second Amendment came up and Fried is pretty much a Second Amendment absolutist. One of our classmates was in favor of gun control—he'd come from an urban environment where guns were a big issue. And, while Barack agreed with our classmate, he was much more willing to hear Fried out—he was very moved by the fact that Fried grew up in the Soviet bloc, where they didn't have those freedoms. After the class, our classmate was still challenging Fried and Barack was just not as passionate and I didn't understand that." Recently, Obama said that if Bush decided to veto a

military spending bill on the ground that it included a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq, he, Obama, would support removing the timetable in order to pass the bill. Liberal bloggers were irate at this capitulation, but the writer Samantha Power, who has worked for Obama on foreign policy, says, "Standing on one side of the room with his arms folded is just not his M.O."

This is, again, partly a matter of temperament. "By nature, I'm not somebody who gets real worked up about things," Obama writes in his second book. "When I see Ann Coulter or Sean Hannity baying across the television screen, I find it hard to take them seriously." He tends to think of his opponents as deluded and ridiculous, rather than as demons. "I've never been a conspiracy theorist," he says. "I've never believed there are a bunch of people out there who are pulling all the strings and pressing all the buttons. And the reason is that the older I get, the more time I spend meeting people in government or in the corporate arena, the more human everybody becomes. What I do believe is that those with money, those with influence, those with control over how resources are allocated in our society, are very protective of their interests, and they can rationalize infinitely the reasons why they should have more money and power than anyone else, why that's somehow good for the society as a whole."

Obama's drive to compromise goes beyond the call of political expediency—it's instinctive, almost a tic. "Barack has an incredible ability to synthesize seemingly



contradictory realities and make them coherent," Cassandra Butts says. "It comes from going from a home where white people are nurturing you, and then you go out into the world and you're seen as a black person. He had to figure out whether he was going to accept this contradiction and be just one of those things, or find a way to realize that these pieces make up the whole." In the state senate, this skill served him well—he was unusually dexterous with opponents, and passed bills that at first were judged too liberal to have a chance, such as one that mandated the videotaping of police interviews with suspects arrested for capital crimes. "In our seminar, whether we were arguing about labor or religion or politics, he would sit back like a resource person and then he would say, I hear Jane saying such and such, and Tom seems to disagree on that, but then Tom and Jane both agree on this," Robert Putnam says. (For a couple of years, Obama participated in a seminar about rebuilding community, inspired by Putnam's article "Bowling Alone.") "I don't mean he makes all conflicts go away—that would be crazy. But his natural instinct is not dividing the baby in half—it's looking for areas of convergence. This is part of who he is really deep down, and it's an amazing skill. It's not always the right skill: the truth doesn't always lie somewhere in the middle. But I think at this moment America is in a situation where we agree much more than we think we do. I know this from polling data—we feel divided in racial terms, religious terms, class terms, all kinds of terms, but we exaggerate how much we disagree with each other. And that's why I think he's right for this time." Even when he was very young, Obama was scornful of, as he puts it, "people who preferred the dream to the reality, impotence to compromise."

Sometimes, of course, there is no possibility of convergence—a question must be answered yes or no. In such a case, Obama may stand up for what he believes in, or he may not. "If there's a deep moral conviction that gay marriage is wrong, if a majority of Americans believe on principle that marriage is an institution for men and women, I'm not at all sure he shares that view, but he's not an in-your-face type," Cass Sunstein, a colleague of Obama's at the University of Chicago, says. "To go in the face of people with religious convictions—that's something he'd be very re-

luctant to do." This is not, Sunstein believes, due only to pragmatism; it also stems from a sense that there is something worthy of respect in a strong and widespread moral feeling, even if it's wrong. "Rawls talks about civic toleration as a *modus vivendi*, a way that we can live together, and some liberals think that way," Sunstein says. "But I think with Obama it's more like Learned Hand when he said, 'The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right.' Obama takes that really seriously. I think the reason that conservatives are O.K. with him is both that he might agree with them on some issues and that even if he comes down on a different side, he knows he might be wrong. I can't think of an American politician who has thought in that way, ever."

Obama is, in fact, committed to respecting the opinions or cultures of others even when religious beliefs aren't involved. "There are universal values that I will fight for," he says. "I think there may have been a time and a place in which genital mutilation was culturally appropriate, but those times are over. I'm not somebody who believes that our foreign policy has to be driven by moral relativism. What I do believe is that we have to apply judgment and a sense of proportion to how change happens in any society—to promote our ideals and our values with some sense of humility."

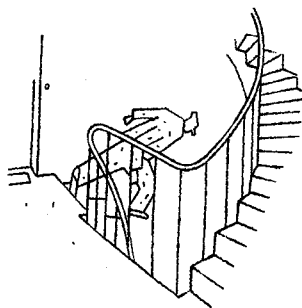
"Lincoln is a hero of his," Sunstein says—Obama announced his candidacy in front of the Old State Capitol in Springfield in order to draw a connection between himself and that other skinny politician from Illinois—"and in the legal culture Lincoln is famous for believing that there are some principles that you can't compromise in terms of speaking, but, in terms of what you *do*, there are pragmatic reasons and sometimes reasons of principle not to act on them. Alexander Bickel, in 'The Least Dangerous Branch,' made this aspect of Lincoln famous, and I don't know if Obama has this

directly from Bickel, but if he doesn't he has it from law school." Lincoln, Bickel wrote, "held 'that free government was, in principle, incompatible with chattel slavery.' . . . Yet he was no abolitionist." Should freed slaves become the equals of white men? "The feelings of 'the great mass of white people' would not admit of this," Bickel described Lincoln as thinking, "and hence here also principle would have to yield to necessity." Lincoln wrote, "Whether this feeling accords with justice and sound judgment, is not the sole question, if indeed, it is any part of it. A universal feeling, whether well or ill-founded, can not be safely disregarded."

Obama has staked his candidacy on union—on bringing together two halves of America that are profoundly divided, and by associating himself with Lincoln—and he knows what both of those things mean. He calls America's founding a "grand compromise": compromise, for him, is not an eroding of principle for the sake of getting something done but a principle in itself—the certainty of uncertainty, the fundament of union. "I would save the Union," Lincoln wrote, in a letter to Horace Greeley, the editor of the *New York Tribune*. "If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that." "I like to believe that for Lincoln it was never a matter of abandoning conviction for the sake of expediency," Obama writes. "Rather . . . that we must talk and reach for common understandings, precisely because all of us are imperfect and can never act with the certainty that God is on our side."

Obama sat leaning back in a chair in his office in Washington. He gave the impression that he would be perfectly comfortable sitting in that chair, without moving, all day. As he spoke, he waved his hand in a vague, regal gesture, like somebody absent-mindedly swatting away a fly. He talked about the aftermath of the Iraq war, how he believes that it is crucial to avoid a Vietnam-syndrome-style retreat into isolation.

"There are no countries now with no security implications," he said. "If you have ungoverned spaces, they become havens for terrorists and breeding grounds for pandemics and generate refugees that can

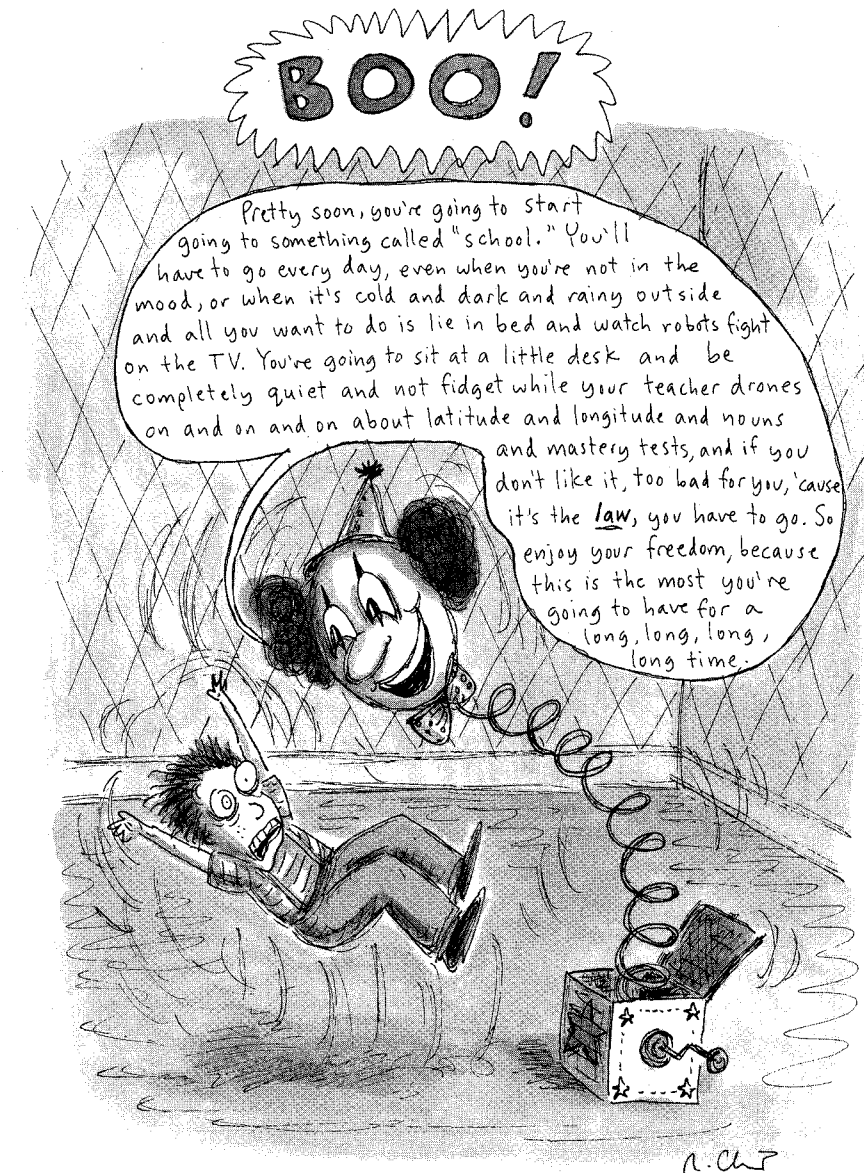


destabilize areas that are of great interest to us. Security and humanitarian concerns are all part of one project, which is to create a world in which people see enough opportunity that they end up sharing our interest in maintaining order. . . . I would take some of the troops that we redeploy out of Iraq and use them to bolster NATO forces in Afghanistan. I think we still have the opportunity to succeed there."

Obama has become known for his skepticism about the Iraq war, but he is not a dove, nor is he averse to thinking in international terms. Two of the issues to which he has devoted the most attention since he arrived in the U.S. Senate, avian flu and nuclear nonproliferation, are grand global problems, which, while relatively uncontroversial, are nonetheless risky choices for signature issues, since, in both cases, success is invisible, and failure could mean disaster of world-changing proportions. Still, it seems that this global mode of thinking is comparatively new for him. When the first President Bush invaded Iraq, Obama was in his late twenties and thinking seriously about a career in politics, but friends from that time don't recall his opinion of the war. "I don't want to make claims as if I had been in a position to articulate a clear position on it," he says. "I remember believing that Saddam's invasion justified international action, and had I been forced to articulate a policy I'd like to think that I would have supported it once the international coalition was put together. You know, I was busy in law school at the time, or studying for the bar."

Obama had just returned to his office for an hour or so after voting on the floor of the Senate. He had spent the morning shuttling between the Senate and his office, being briefed on his schedule, chewing gum as he walked. It took him about ten minutes to make the trip each time, a delay sufficiently irritating that Obama's assistant expended considerable effort to avoid it. That day, she had tried to book the Senate's President's Room for a meeting, but Hillary Clinton's assistant had got there ahead of her.

In the office reception area, crowds of people milled about, many of them unscheduled; the office had become something of a tourist attraction. Marian Wright Edelman had marshalled a group of faith leaders, parents, and sample sick children to speak with Obama for a min-



ute or two about children's health. About twenty rotund, middle-aged firefighters arrived and, too many to fit in the office, stood in the hallway, blocking the door. A couple of reporters from the Chicago *Tribune*—two of several people the paper has assigned to cover the Obama beat full time—waited on the sofa for a delayed interview. (The day had begun with a candidates' forum sponsored by a builders' union at which Obama was scheduled to speak after Senator Joseph Biden, and, as a consequence, a winking press aide told the reporters—we all know what happens when you speak after Joe Biden—Obama was going to be late to everything for the rest of the day.) A white father from Winnetka had brought his two sons, the elder of whom, about nine years old, begged to wait as long as it took to spot Obama for

even a second. (After an hour, a receptionist suggested that they come back the following morning.) Two teen-age girls—one, from Lake Elmo, Minnesota, carrying a soda, another, wearing pink tights and carrying a frozen yogurt—stopped by, hoping for a photograph with the Senator. A receptionist gave them a black-and-white portrait from a pile she kept at her desk, and the girls squealed in delight. The girl with the soda snapped a few photographs of the reception area and the empty conference room next to it and signed the guest book. "Where are you? No picture?" she wrote, next to more conventional comments ("Good luck Your Sweet," "My hero!," "Thank you, you rock!").

The moment Obama's Senate schedule ends for the week, he flies somewhere to campaign over the weekend, usually

Iowa. "What an unbelievable crowd, I am so grateful to all of you for taking the time out on a Sunday afternoon to be here today." Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, mid-February. "Let me thank first of all the person who just introduced me, Tom Miller, who is just an outstanding attorney general." Small town after small town, street after street of one- and two-story houses with lawns, then the commercial strip, the same everywhere, McDonald's, Burger King, Holiday Inn, Super 8, Wal-Mart, Kmart, Super Target, and then the smaller regional stores with names that rhyme—Rib Crib, Hobby Lobby, Taco Tico, Prime N' Wine.

"I am Barack Obama and I'm running for President." Algona High School, Algona, Iowa. Early April. "A state senate seat in the area where I lived opened up and some people I knew in the community got involved and asked me if I'd be interested," Obama said. "I did what every black man does when confronted with a major decision like that: I prayed on it, and I asked my wife." (Laughter.) "And after consulting those two higher powers I did what every first-time candidate does, which is to talk to anyone who will listen to you. I'd go to PTA meetings, I'd go to the barbershop, I'd go to softball games, and everywhere I went I'd get the same two questions. First question: Where'd

you get that funny name, Barack Obama? Although people would mispronounce it. They would call me Alabama, they called me Yo' Mama." (Laughter.) "But the second question was what led me to run for President. People would ask me, 'You seem like a nice guy, you have a fancy law degree, you make a lot of money, you've got a beautiful, churchgoing family, why would you want to go into something dirty and nasty like politics?'"

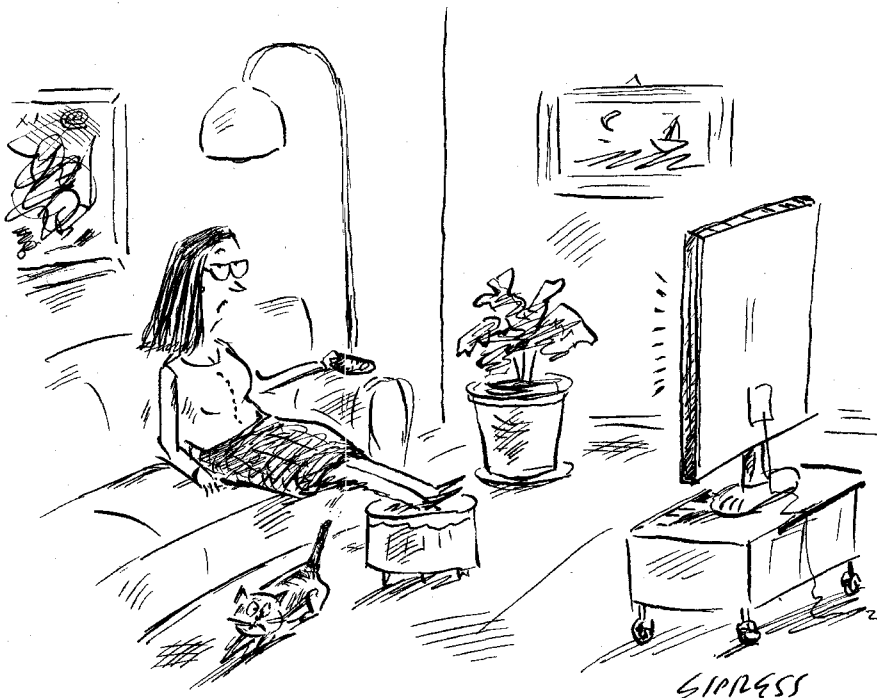
"He's always wanted to be President," Valerie Jarrett, who has been a family friend for years, ever since she hired Michelle Obama to work in Mayor Daley's office, says. (Michelle Obama is now an executive at the University of Chicago Hospitals.) "He didn't always admit it, but oh, absolutely. The first time he said it to me, he said, 'I just think I have some special qualities and wouldn't it be a shame to waste them.' I think it was during the early part of his U.S. senatorial campaign. He said, 'You know, I just think I have something.'"

"Some people who knew of my activism in the community asked me would I be interested in running for that office," Obama said in Ames. "And so I did what every wise man does when confronted with such a decision: I prayed on it, and I asked my wife." (Laughter.) It remains to be seen how well Obama adapts himself to campaigning. It doesn't come alto-

gether naturally to him. Late last year, when he was thinking about whether to run, friends asked him if he was ready for a fight, if the thought got his adrenaline going, and he would say, "Yes—but I don't know if I want the hassle." That's not something you imagine somebody embarking on a Presidential campaign saying—not wanting the hassle. "But that's why he's so likable," a friend says. "That's the quality people are seeing in him, they're seeing how campaigning could be a grind." "Bill Clinton was far more into the tactics of politics," David Axelrod, Obama's chief campaign adviser, says. "He was a voracious consumer of polls. Of course, he was so indefatigable that he could do that and still read four books a week and be President of the United States. You wouldn't hire Barack to run your campaign. You might hire Bill Clinton to run your campaign."

This is not the only difference between Obama and Clinton. To compare them is to see that a political natural, as both of them are called, can mean very different things. "Bill Clinton has preternatural ability as a listener," Robert Putnam says. "Everybody always walks away from him thinking, For the first time in my life someone has actually listened to me—that man Bill Clinton is the first person in the world to really understand me. It's almost magical—even Newt Gingrich said something like, Every time I meet him I feel like I have to go rinse my mind out for an hour. Barack is not that good." Putnam's is a common reaction; it seems to be a response to Clinton's passionate political drive, his hunger, the need he is said to have to make everybody love him. Some of this quality, in a more restrained, sublimated form, is present, too, in Hillary Clinton—in her intense desire to win people over, in her exhaustive preparation, in her willingness to give everything she is capable of for every single vote.

This is not Obama's style at all. He doesn't seem hungry. He seems to like people but not to need them. When most politicians speak to a crowd, they give the impression that that is what they live for; Obama at town-hall meetings appears engaged but not fervently so, as if there were several other things that he would be equally happy doing that day. He still has the speechmaking power that he displayed at the 2004 Convention, but for the most part he keeps it in reserve. Even



"Ask your doctor if taking a pill to solve all your problems is right for you."

at large rallies these days he doesn't try to overwhelm—his eyes don't flame, his hands remain unclenched and below his shoulders, he doesn't go for a sudden conversion experience. (Sometimes his wife, Michelle, appears onstage with him, and this further dilutes the evangelical tone: the way Obama depicts Michelle in his books and speeches makes her sound like a sitcom wife, rolling her eyes at his excesses, affectionately taking him down a peg if he becomes pompous, humorously scolding him for not picking up his socks, and so her down-to-earth, TV presence undercuts his movie uplift.)

Obama is, obviously, running for President: it's not that he isn't hungry for converts but that his way of courting them is subtle. When his speechwriter, Jon Favreau, who in 2004 wrote speeches for John Kerry, was interviewed for the job, Obama asked him what his theory of speechwriting was. "I didn't have a grand theory in my pocket," Favreau says, "but I told him, When I saw you at the Convention what really struck me was that you told a story from the beginning to the end of that speech—a story about your life, about how it fit in with the larger American story—and it built to a point where people wanted to applaud, rather than using forced applause lines. Democrats just haven't done that. And Barack said, That's exactly what I try to do." That is Obama's theory of speeches, and it seems, also, to be his theory of campaigning: don't try to score huge points at every moment, don't kill yourself for every vote—a campaign is a long, slow story, and you don't want to exhaust your audience or yourself. "One weekend I was with him they were making a big deal about his school in Indonesia being a madrasa," Valerie Jarrett says. "I said, 'How could they have even run with this story? It's so completely inaccurate!' He said, 'You know, we've contacted the school and the principal's gonna explain what kind of a school it is and we're gonna refute it all. You need to just calm down. This is gonna be fun! Valerie, you're not a guy but let me explain it to you in sport terms. It's like we're in a basketball game, and I'm gonna fumble the ball, and someone's gonna steal the ball, and I'm gonna miss a free throw, but we're gonna win the game. You can't get yourself worked up over every little thing that

somebody says about me or you're gonna go crazy.'"

When Christopher Edley first met Obama, in law school, he decided that he would go far, because of his centeredness. Then when, later, he read Obama's first book and saw how Obama had suspected and vivisected himself for so many years, he decided that he would go far because of that. "The capacity for self-reflection is in my experience invaluable for a candidate or a President," he says. (Edley worked in the Carter and Clinton Administrations and for Dukakis's campaign.) "It's difficult to describe to someone who hasn't been involved how tough a Presidential campaign is. When you spend day after day flying around the country in an aluminum tube at forty thousand feet, it's the easiest thing in the world to lose yourself. And when every misstep becomes a thirty-six-hour media disaster there's every reason to second-guess your instincts, so being sensitive to your strengths and weaknesses and having the courage to come to terms with them is helpful when you're facing a crisis. I've seen candidates who, like a deer frozen in headlights, can't find their way forward and have to be led around by staff. I've also seen candidates who, faced with adversity, turn into the stubbornest of mules and can't adapt or adjust. Most candidates walk into the room asking everybody 'How'm I doing? How'm I doing?,' with no ability to look at themselves in the mirror. So the ability that Barack shows in the book to be brutally self-reflective—this is deep stuff."

"When he's exhausted on day forty of the campaign fund-raising drive, in the grind of it, can he keep it up?" a friend says. "I think sometimes he feels phony to himself. He's going to struggle with being the candidate, being a regular guy who has become a persona named Barack Obama. The persona is going to get larger and larger, and more and more distant from him and the way he used to live his life. We have a real live human being running for President here. He doesn't have much experience in this kind of campaigning, and this is both his strength and his vulnerability."

Some people go into politics with an idea; Obama went in with an example. The only politician he discusses at any length in his first book is the black man who was mayor of

Chicago when Obama first moved there, in 1985, Harold Washington. Obama doesn't mention what platform Washington ran on, or what he accomplished in office (though he implies that it wasn't much); he talks about the effect his election had on the black community. When he first arrived in the city, Obama noticed that, all over the South Side, people had hung Washington's picture on their walls. "The night Harold won, let me tell you, people just ran the streets," a barber Obama calls Smitty says. "It was like the day Joe Louis knocked out Schmeling. Same feeling. People weren't just proud of Harold. They were proud of themselves." Washington's victory, Obama saw, had produced in people an almost religious feeling of deliverance. "Like my idea of organizing," he concluded, Washington "held out an offer of collective redemption." It is unlikely that Obama would speak of his own candidacy in these terms—that would be embarrassing. But his talk of unity, his avoidance of blame, and his promise to end the war all seem intended to gesture to a similar prospect of redemption: not only for black people but for white people (for voting for a black man), for Republicans (for embracing unity with a Democrat), and for Americans (for saying to the world that the war was a mistake).

But redemption is brittle. After Harold Washington died suddenly, in his second term, his achievement, such as it was, fell to pieces almost at once. "There was no political organization in place, no clearly defined principles to follow," Obama writes. "The entire of black politics had centered around one man who radiated like a sun." To a man less conservative, this failure might have been crushing—a demonstration of the impossibility of change—but to Obama it seemed only one more proof that charisma is misleading, that revolutions are illusory, that real change is slow. Now that he is running for office himself, it is likely he knows he can be as much harmed as lifted up by celestial expectations, so he tries, in small ways, to discourage them. Obama stands on the ground. If he thought his winning would take a revolution, he wouldn't have run. ♦

THE IDOL THIEF

Inside one of the biggest antiquities-smuggling rings in history.

BY PATRICK RADDEN KEEFE

Early one morning in June, 2003, two dozen police officers drew their guns and prepared to raid a stately three-story brick-and-concrete home on a corner lot in Everest Colony, a quiet residential neighborhood on the outskirts of the Indian city of Jaipur. Several khaki-clad officers scaled the imposing stone wall surrounding the house, disarmed a guard, and opened the gate. Under the gaze of a security camera, the rest of the team filed silently onto the property. The raid was the culmination of a year-long investigation and months of surveillance, during which officers had posed as vagrants and fruit peddlers. They had timed the strike for dawn, hoping to startle the inhabitants.

The officers called out, "Open the door!" and banged on the locked front entrance. They waited, but no one came. Then someone spotted smoke billowing from a third-floor window. The superintendent of police, Anand Shrivastava, ordered his men to break down the door. They ran upstairs to the master bedroom, where they found the owner, Vaman Narayan Ghiya, standing in his pajamas, hurriedly throwing documents into an improvised fire on the floor.

"How dare you?" Ghiya shouted. "How could you enter my house?" He cursed at the officers who rushed to restrain him, struggling and shouting, "You cannot touch me!"

The police led Ghiya away, and gathered his wife, son, and two daughters, who had been awakened by the raid. Then Superintendent Shrivastava and his men searched the house, spending hours rummaging through the elegant rooms. Behind the wood panelling of Ghiya's private study, the officers discovered a set of secret cupboards, which held hundreds of photographs of ancient Indian sculptures: graceful stone figures of the deities Vishnu, Shiva, and Parvati and Parvati's elephant-headed son, Ganesha; Jain Tirthankaras and Chola bronzes; danc-

ing goddesses with many arms and melon breasts, festooned with delicately rendered ornaments. The photographs were color snapshots, and the objects pictured sat outdoors, in patches of grass or mud. Many evidently had been roughly pried away from temple walls and were missing limbs or heads. The police also discovered sixty-eight glossy auction catalogues from Sotheby's and Christie's in London and New York.

This stash seemed to confirm Shrivastava's suspicion that Vaman Ghiya operated one of the most extensive and sophisticated clandestine antiquities rings in history, and that he had grown rich in the past three decades by smuggling thousands of Indian antiques to auction houses and private collectors in the West. The police found no sculptures in Ghiya's home. But, in the days that followed, Shrivastava's men raided half a dozen properties that Ghiya owned around Jaipur, his farm outside the city, and various godowns, or storage facilities, in Mathura and Delhi. They discovered antique paintings, swords and shields, marble panels, stone pillars, three hundred and forty-eight pieces of sculpture, and a dismantled Mogul pavilion the size of a small house.

Vaman Ghiya was an enigma in Jaipur's tight-knit art world. A handsome man with silvering hair, small, nervous eyes, and an aloof, imperious manner, he wore elegant suits and conducted business in Jaipur's nicest hotels. People who know him say that he spent much of the year travelling and maintained a single-minded focus on business. He distrusted even his closest associates. "He wouldn't make small talk. He just wanted to do the deal," one of his buyers told me. "He was totally opaque."

Ghiya's legitimate business was the Crafts Palace, a colossal handicrafts showroom on Jaipur's Amer Road. Jaipur is a prosperous city of nearly three million people, the capital of the north-

western Indian state of Rajasthan. With its picturesque old quarter—known as the Pink City, for its grapefruit-colored architecture—and elaborate Rajput palaces in the surrounding countryside, Jaipur has long been a major stop on the tourist route through India. It is the center of India's gemstone industry, and of a flourishing trade in handicrafts—small, mass-produced brass animals and other figurines that are sold to tourists and exported in bulk.

Ghiya's handicrafts business had many hallmarks of a front. India's Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, passed in 1972, is a particularly stringent measure, which requires that any privately owned work of art that is more than a hundred years old be registered with the government. Since it is generally illegal to export such objects, to be an antique dealer in India with an international clientele is also arguably to be a criminal. But Indian customs officers are required to check only ten per cent of any large shipment of exports, and smugglers frequently bury a single priceless statue in a giant case of bric-a-brac. Other Jaipur handicrafts dealers told the police that they knew nothing about Ghiya's buyers or suppliers. His ostensibly thriving enterprise seemed to have no connection to the local economy, and Ghiya spent very little time at the showroom; his son, who was in his twenties, ran the shop.

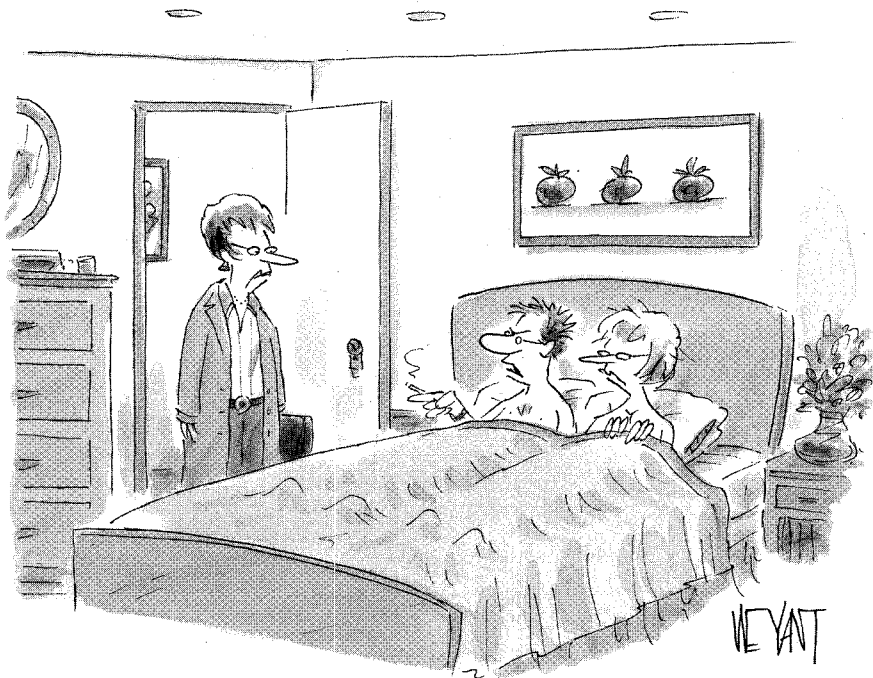
In the summer of 2002, posing undercover as antique buyers, Anand Shrivastava and his men had rounded up a gang of thirty-four temple thieves who were trying to sell looted Hindu idols on the black market. Although the statues had little artistic merit, and were not antiques, the thieves were demanding high prices. Shrivastava wondered whether some wealthy local buyer might be driving up prices; when interrogated, the thieves all told him that it was Vaman Narayan Ghiya. "He is the king of this world," they said.

Shrivastava, who is thirty-seven, has a

GERALD SCARFE



On Vaman Ghiya's properties, the police found paintings, sculptures, and a dismantled Mogul pavilion the size of a house.



"Helen, I really wish you would respect my creative process."

sharp, vulpine nose and a neat mustache. "First, let me take out all the literature," he said when I visited him last summer at his new post, in Bharatpur, a town several hours northeast of Jaipur. The Indian police force is punctiliously hierarchical, and Shrivastava carries himself with an air of impatient authority. When we traversed the fifty yards from his official residence to his office, he insisted that we do so in a government-issue sedan, driven by an unsmiling chauffeur. We sat at Shrivastava's sprawling desk, in an office with two air-conditioners and four ceiling fans, and ate pomegranate seeds while a deputy unwrapped a series of large red blankets tied with string, revealing stacks of art-history books and monographs, photocopied articles and evidence reports, and dozens of auction catalogues.

"This is just a glimpse," Shrivastava said with evident pride. "All of my photographs and literature filled two rooms."

Officials at India's Central Bureau of Investigation told Shrivastava that they had suspected for decades that Ghiya was one of India's biggest antique thieves, but his operation was so sophisticated that they had never been able to gather sufficient evidence against him. "He's become stronger and bigger than the law," Shrivastava marvelled. It occurred to

Shrivastava that Ghiya represented both an information vacuum for law enforcement and a portal through which India was slowly losing its cultural heritage. Operation Black Hole began in June, 2002, with an initial team of twelve policemen. "I told my chaps, 'Find out who that bugger is,'" Shrivastava said.

International antiquities smuggling is effectively a white-collar crime in India: it requires capital and education, and the participants use the wealth that the business generates to cultivate an image of social respectability. Worldwide, the looted-antiquities market could be as much as a multibillion-dollar industry, and in recent years several cases have revealed the role of smuggling in arts acquisition at the highest levels, causing a scandal in the art world. But the shadowy practices of the smugglers who supply the international market have rarely been detailed. When Ghiya was charged with multiple counts of possession of stolen property and trafficking in looted antiquities, and was thrown into Jaipur Central Jail—where he remains today, held without bail, and forbidden by the court to speak to anyone but his lawyers and his family—the story made national headlines. (Ghiya has pleaded not guilty and has instructed his lawyers not to speak with the press.) "Peo-

ple were shocked," Chandramani Singh, a Jaipur archeologist who knew Ghiya's father, told me. "But I think many of them knew he was doing such things."

Stone temples devoted to the major Hindu deities have been the focus of theistic cults on the Indian subcontinent since the fifth century, and these shrines, often full of carved images of major and minor gods, can still be found throughout the country, along with a profusion of Buddhist and Islamic antiquities. "There are too many things, too many sites," Singh said. "It is easier for a Westerner, because they don't have such an amount of history." In a populous developing country like India, state and national authorities have few resources, Singh explained, and demand for clean drinking water, irrigation, roads, and other priorities means that archeological preservation remains underfunded. The Archaeological Survey of India has been unable to create a comprehensive national register of every temple and archeological site, much less protect them all from incursion.

In February, 1998, a gang of thieves visited a secluded site called Baroli, near the confluence of the Chambal and Bhamini Rivers, in eastern Rajasthan. Set back from the road and surrounded by trees, the ornate stone shrines at Baroli were erected between the eighth and the twelfth centuries. There are nine temples in all, one of them rising majestically out of a small pond, along with numerous stone pillars and lingas, often regarded as the traditional phallic symbol of Shiva's generative power. Hindu villagers still worship in the crumbling temples, but Baroli attracts few tourists, and there is little to deter enterprising scavengers.

For religious Hindus, images of the gods are not merely representational; they can be inhabited by the deity they depict. The faithful anoint the statues with oils, camphor, and sandalwood, garland them with flowers, and make offerings of food, incense, and music. (The word "idol," though largely abandoned by Western academics because of its perceived pejorative connotation, remains in use in India to describe these objects.) When, in 1986, the Indian government sued for the return of a twelfth-century bronze Shiva that had been looted from a village in Pathur, it did so on behalf of the offended god himself: Shiva was named as a plaintiff in

the case. "In the south, people still don't tell lies in Shiva's temple," Ashok Shekhar, a former state arts and culture official in Rajasthan, told me. "These are very hotheaded deities."

Looting a temple, therefore, is a sacrilegious act—the province of an especially unscrupulous criminal element. In Baroli, the thieves approached one of the best-preserved of the temples, a fifty-eight-foot-tall beehive-shaped building devoted to Shiva and lined with dramatic sculptures: three-headed Brahmas, bejewelled Lakshmis, a dozen incarnations of Vishnu, and a parade of other deities and attendants. Along the sanctum's western wall, a jaunty stone Shiva danced atop a lotus flower. Dating to the tenth century, the statue was adorned with a tasselled belt and anklets, and clutched a serpent in one of his many hands. Shiva is a supreme god, and in Hindu theology he assumes several different forms; the sensuous contortions of dancing Shivas make them popular among Western collectors. Using a jack, the thieves dislodged the statue from the niche it had occupied for a thousand years.

According to Shrivastava, the thieves sold the piece to Ghiya, who smuggled it out of India. When the local villagers discovered the theft, they were outraged. Ghiya quickly commissioned a replica of the Shiva and ordered his men to deposit it by the side of the road near the local police station. The local authorities triumphantly announced its recovery. Fearing that the Shiva might be stolen again, they decided not to return it to the temple, and stored it in an Archaeological Survey facility in the nearby city of Chittorgarh.

Under interrogation, Ghiya admitted to the police that he had sent the original to England, where it ended up in the private collection of John Kasmin, a well-known figure in the London art world. After the magazine *India Today* ran a story following Ghiya's arrest which suggested that Kasmin now had the Shiva, Kasmin faxed Shrivastava, insisting that he had "legally and innocently" bought the statue in London, but also volunteering to return it to India without compensation. (Kasmin told me recently that he had bought the sculpture not from Ghiya but from a dealer in London.) After the local police at Baroli learned from Shrivastava that Kasmin was allegedly in possession of the real

Shiva, a panel of archeologists was summoned to inspect the Shiva being held in Chittorgarh. The panel declared it a fake.

The Western market for Indian sculpture was slow to develop. During the colonial era, these objects were often considered mere curiosities. British visitors occasionally helped themselves: Lord Hastings tore out the marble bath in Shah Jahan's palace at Agra to send to George IV as a gift; George Curzon, the viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905, recalled how nineteenth-century picnickers brought chisels to the Taj Mahal and "whiled away the afternoon by chipping out fragments of agate . . . from the cenotaphs of the Emperor and his lamented Queen." But, by the mid-twentieth century, influential American collectors like John D. Rockefeller III and the canned-food magnate Norton Simon were beginning to develop collections, and museums that had already established strong Chinese and Japanese holdings were looking to South Asia as well. Just as India outlawed the export of antiques, demand for them—and the prices they could fetch—soared. Some American museums, like the Cleveland Museum, slowed their rate of acquisition of Indian objects after 1972, but others, according to a Cambridge University study, assembled the bulk of their collections at a time when it was illegal for such objects to leave India.

"Everybody knew all of these lovely Indian sculptures don't come from Malibu Beach or Indiana," Thomas Hoving, who was the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1967 to 1977, told me. "But people were willing to look the other way." In 1973, Norton Simon bought a beautiful tenth-century bronze Nataraja, or dancing Shiva, from a dealer in New York for a million dollars. But the Indian government intervened, saying that the statue had been stolen from a village in Tamil Nadu and smuggled abroad. "Hell, yes, it was smuggled," Simon told the *Times*. "I spent between \$15 and \$16 million in the last two years on Asian art, and most of it was smuggled." It was during this period that Vaman Narayan Ghiya entered the business.

Ghiya was born into a lower-caste family in 1948, the year after independence and partition. His father, Badri Narayan, owned a small photography

shop near Jaipur's City Palace, where he sold Kodak film and did studio portraits; he also framed pictures and occasionally sold paintings. After graduating from Maharaja College, Ghiya went into business selling antique Rajasthani paintings. He made frequent sales trips to Bombay, and opened his own shop in Jaipur. He married, and started a family.

Ariane Dandois, a Frenchwoman who first visited Ghiya's shop in the late seventies, was one of his earliest Western clients. Dandois is tall, blond, and glamorous, the mistress of Elie de Rothschild. She owned an Asian-art gallery on the Rue des Saints-Pères, in Paris. She had first travelled to India as a student at the Sorbonne, and she began spending several months a year in the country, scouting for material. Dandois recalls visiting Ghiya in a small house in which his entire family slept together in one room, on the floor. Ghiya was eager to cultivate Western clients, and he was extremely polite and deferential—"like a *serviteur*," Dandois said. His wife dutifully refilled Dandois's teacup every time she emptied it.

Many maharajas had begun selling off their extensive art collections, and Dandois negotiated with the Maharaja of Bikaner to purchase his entire collection of marble furniture for twenty-five thousand dollars. Ghiya summoned a convoy of trucks to transport all sixty-four pieces of furniture back to Jaipur, and gathered nearly a hundred locals in a courtyard, armed with little bowls of water, to scrub the furniture. The job took a full year.

There were perhaps twenty Western dealers who visited Jaipur in those days—French, Italian, British, and American. They stayed at the Rambagh Palace Hotel, the sprawling former home of Jaipur's royal family, and they came to rely on a new generation of Indian dealers like Ghiya, who could spare Westerners the risk and the discomfort of venturing out of the major cities on their own. Chief among these new dealers, according to people who knew him, was a man named Baliram Sharma. Based in Delhi, Sharma was arrested on several occasions, but he was never jailed for long. He became so influential, one Indian antique dealer told me, that dealers throughout the country "worked under the blessing of Sharma."

"Nowadays, somebody farts here in

Ghiya cultivated dozens of middlemen throughout India. Part of the durability of Ghiya's network, authorities say, was that any given link on the chain knew only the links on either side. What connected these discrete links, from the local thief to the London auction house, was photographs. When a statue was stolen from a temple or bought for some small amount from a local farmer, it was brought to a middleman, who photographed it. The photograph would then make its way, often through further intermediaries, to Ghiya. These photographs were sent to prospective buyers abroad, or taken by Ghiya on sales trips to London and New York. "He'd come with a big stack of Polaroids and you'd go through it,"

LITTLEFOOT, 14

The great mouth of the west hangs open,
 mountain incisors beginning to bite
Into the pink flesh of the sundown.
The end of another day

Renown is a mouthful, here and there.

Rivers and mountains glide through my blood.
Cold pillow, bittersweet years.
In the near distance, a plane's drone
rattles the windows.

Clear night. Wind like a predator
in the sharp grass of the past.

I find it much simpler now to see
the other side of my own death.

It wasn't always that way,
When the rivers were rivers and mountains were mountains.
Now, when the mouth closes,
the wind goes out of everything.

Fame for a hundred years
is merely an afterlife.
And no friend of ours.
Better to watch the rain fall in the branches of winter trees.
Better to have your mail sent
To someone else in another town,
where frost is whiter than moonlight.

Horses, black horses:
Midnight, Five Minutes to Midnight.
Rider up, the sparks from their hooves like stars, like spiked stars.
This is a metaphor for failure,
This is the Rest of It, the beautiful horse, black horse.
Midnight. Dark horse, dark rider.

I love the lethargy of the single cloud,
the stillness of the sky

On winter afternoons, late on winter afternoons,
A little fan of light on the tips of the white pines.

I love the winter light, so thin, so unbuttery,
Transparent as plastic wrap
Clinging so effortlessly to whatever it skins over.

one Western buyer told me. "There was nothing selective about it. It was a ton of junk with some wonderful stuff mixed in."

One evening in Jaipur, I met Abhay Singh, who was Ghiya's driver from 1984 to 2000 and is now a major witness in the government's case against him. Singh is lanky, with pitted cheeks and a

schoolboy part in his hair, and he told me about driving Ghiya into the countryside to rendezvous with middlemen and inspect their wares. Ghiya was extremely cautious, even paranoid, Singh said. Even when he wasn't engaged in a deal, he kept a close watch on the rearview mirror, fearing that their car was being followed. Having selected the pieces he wanted to

—The language of nature, we know, is mathematics.
The language of landscape is language,
Metaphor, metaphor, metaphor,
all down the line.

The sweet-breath baby light of a winter afternoon,
Boy-light, half covered in blue,
almost invisible as breath,
So still in the flower beds, so pale.

Four days till the full moon,
light like a new skin on the dark
Quarter, like light unborrowed, hard,
black hole with its golden floor.

Who knows the happiness of fish,
their wind-raising, ordinary subtleties?
Describing the indescribable,
Image into idea,
the transmission of the spirit,
It cannot be done.

The Chinese principle, *breath-resonance-life-motion*,
Engenders, it was believed.
As does the bone method of brushwork,
Creating structure
in poems as well as pictures.

Plotting in paint, place in poetry,
Completes composition,
the bedrock of spiritual values.
Competent, marvellous, and divine
Were the three degrees of accomplishment.
And still, it cannot be done.

Image resists all transmutation.
All art is meta-art, and has its own satisfactions.
But it's not divine,
as image is,
Untouchable, untransmutable,
wholly magic.

Midnight Special, turn your ever-loving light on me.

—Charles Wright

buy, Ghiya would instruct the middlemen to pack the purchases in their cars and return with him to Jaipur. On the drive back, “he would carry two flags with him, one red and one green,” Singh explained. “If there was any danger, he would show the red flag to them, and they would stop and change their route.” In Jaipur, Ghiya stashed the objects at one of his godowns,

or buried them at his farm, a secluded stretch of grassland dotted with gold and violet wildflowers, with several low-slung concrete buildings and a swimming pool. Ghiya often dug the holes for the sculptures himself. “He would tell the servants he was planting trees,” Singh said.

“He was too scared and too suspicious,” one Jaipur acquaintance told me.

“He doesn’t get along with anybody in his life. Not even his wife.” When Ghiya wasn’t travelling, he came home late at night; he invested his money in real estate; he had no hobbies; and everyone I spoke with agreed that his interest in the business was driven simply by the enormous sums of money to be made.

At times, his wariness bordered on superstition. “One day, I was frozen cold in Ghiya’s house in Jaipur,” Ariane Dandois recalled. “So I said, ‘Come on, Vaman, take your car, you drive me to Delhi. I’m going to sleep in a decent hotel room.’” Ghiya was nervous about bandits on the Jaipur-Delhi road, but he agreed to drive her. As the two walked out to the car, a bird appeared and swooped in a peculiar pattern around the house. “This is bad luck,” Ghiya announced, and said that he could not possibly undertake the journey. Dandois tried to reason with him, but he refused.

Ghiya’s caution deepened after he narrowly avoided smuggling charges, in 1989. Customs officers in Mumbai had discovered twenty-one antique objects during a random check of one of his handicrafts shipments. According to the police, and other antique dealers in Jaipur, when the authorities reexamined the container they concluded that the incriminating items were replicas, not actual antiques. That may have been true, or it may be that Ghiya had bribed the right official. But it is also possible that someone switched the real antiques for fakes. One common smuggler’s tactic in India is to prepare a copy of a looted antique and present it to the Archaeological Survey; once the survey grants a certificate of “non-antiquity,” the certificate accompanies the genuine antique out of the country.

At around this time, Baliram Sharma retired and, Shrivastava told me, Ghiya “started building an empire.” But, while most dealers and smugglers of Indian antiques insist on inspecting an object before paying for it, Ghiya stopped travelling to the countryside, making his initial selections by examining photographs. The objects were then routed to godowns in Mathura and Delhi, eliminating the transshipment point in Jaipur. Periodically, Ghiya inspected items before sending them abroad, but he increasingly depended on middlemen and photographs.

“He would never leave the photos

around," Abhay Singh told me. "The photos would come and he . . . would immediately mail those photographs to his buyers."

In 1991, the British journalist Peter Watson was covering the art market for London's *Observer* when he came into contact with a former Sotheby's employee named James Hodges. Hodges had worked at the auction house for more than a decade, until 1989. Later, it was discovered that he had removed an ancient bronze helmet and a terra-cotta bowl from the premises. He was charged with theft, forgery, and false accounting, and was facing trial. Hodges told Watson that corruption and crime were pervasive at Sotheby's. In the course of several years, he had assembled a dossier of papers, filling three suitcases, that he said documented a business environment in which smuggling and tax evasion were routine.

While Hodges was at Sotheby's, he said, a number of the auction house's big-

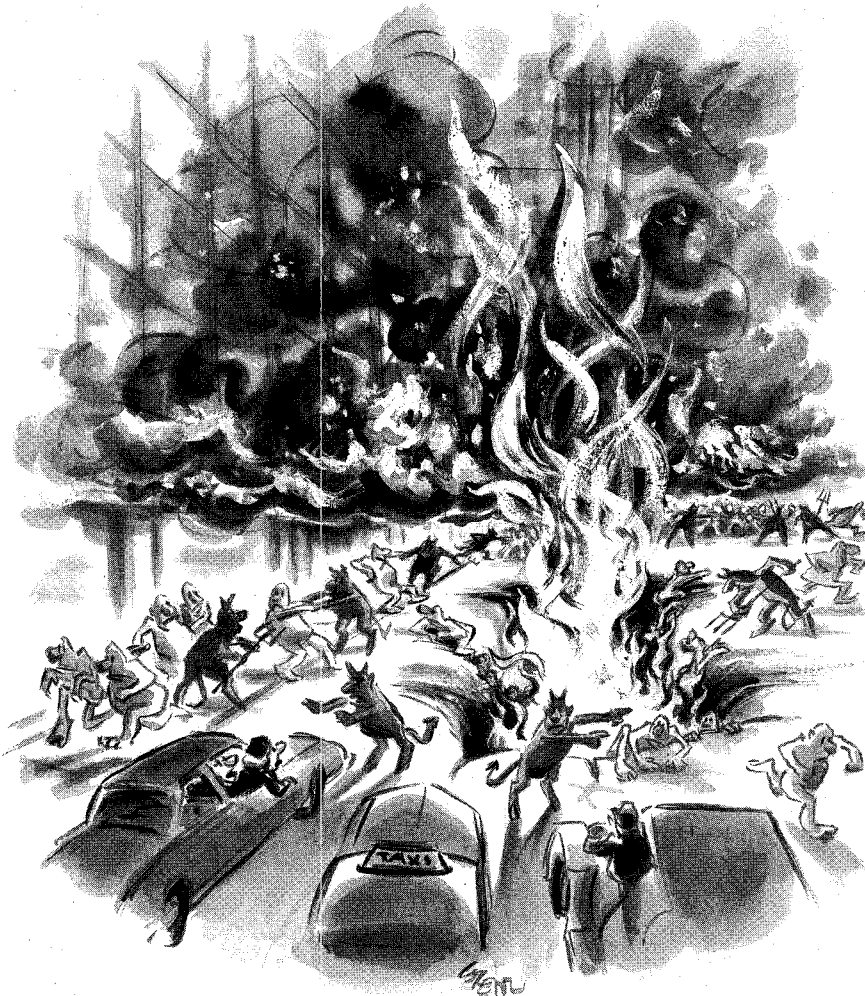
gest suppliers had prompted him to open fake bank accounts. These accounts operated as slush funds for a handful of dealers who consigned large amounts of unprovenanced antiquities. One of these dealers was Giacomo Medici, an Italian smuggler whose Geneva warehouse was raided by the authorities in 1997 and was found to contain several thousand archaeological works. Medici, it turned out, was a prolific black marketer with extensive contacts in auction houses and museums. His subsequent trial in Italy implicated Marion True, the antiquities curator of the Getty, who is currently on trial in Rome. (Medici was convicted and is appealing the decision; True has pleaded not guilty.) Another beneficiary of the accounts, Hodges told Watson, was "a Mr. Ghiya of Jaipur."

Hodges explained that Ghiya was "a kind of Indian Medici," whose relationship with Sotheby's was so close that he would stop at Hodges's house in Shepherd's Bush on his way into Lon-

don from the airport to drop off antiques he had carried on the plane. After establishing contact with the auction house, in the early nineteen-eighties, Ghiya flooded the antiquities department with items. Hodges showed Watson a 1986 department memo that said, "We now have a clear understanding of what should be sent [by Ghiya] and have ruled out the lower end of the market." Brendan Lynch, one of Sotheby's Indian-antiquities experts, had met with Ghiya, and the memo proposed that Lynch begin visiting Ghiya in Jaipur twice a year to acquire objects. "Any visit by a Sotheby's expert will be monitored in India and justification for such a visit should be readily available," the memo said. "It is unconvincing to say every expert is there on holiday and even the pretext of 'writing a book' is wearing pretty thin!" In another memo, Felicity Nicholson, who was then the director of antiquities at Sotheby's, professed to find "the shady side of the antiquities market not uncongenial."

Some of these memos were produced by Hodges's defense team when his trial commenced at London's Knightsbridge Crown Court, in November, 1991. Hodges, who was ultimately convicted of theft and false accounting, testified that the fraudulent bank accounts were considered an "extra service" for clients like Ghiya, and that he kept cash from the accounts in a special cupboard in Sotheby's offices, because "one couldn't keep on popping down to the bank." Brendan Lynch, who had become Ghiya's closest contact at Sotheby's, fared especially poorly on the stand. When he was asked about his trips to India, he insisted that his purpose was not to acquire objects but merely to conduct "research and . . . valuations." But the defense produced an expense report from a 1988 trip, in which Lynch had written, under "Purpose of Visit," "To obtain property for the June 13 Indian sale." When Lynch was asked whether he had ever hidden in the closet at Vaman Ghiya's Jaipur home, he replied that he had not, but he conceded that on one occasion, when the police visited Ghiya, he did hide in the other room.

The trial was followed closely in the British press, but, even after Lynch's testimony, the auction house did not terminate its relationship with Ghiya. Watson's book, "Sotheby's: The Inside Story,"



"It doesn't look like a ruptured gas line to me."

was published in 1997, and had a more pronounced effect. Brendan Lynch left the company, and Sotheby's announced that it was closing its London antiquities department. "It has always been Sotheby's policy to be sensitive to issues of patrimony and heritage," a spokesman said at the time. He added that Sotheby's would continue to auction antiquities, but solely through New York.

When Shrivastava began his investigation, he knew nothing of Watson's book. In the first phase of Operation Black Hole, he dispatched officers around the country to pose as buyers. "The operation would be successful if I could catch hold of one branch at a time," Shrivastava told me. "The actual thief, then the transporter, then the first middleman, then the second, main middleman, then the packer who does the packaging in Delhi, then the exporter, then Ghiya." As it happened, Ghiya had a tendency to turn on business partners and subordinates, and to terminate relationships on the slightest suspicion. ("He had no friends," I was told on more than one occasion in Jaipur.) The caution and distrust that had enabled Vaman Ghiya to remain at large for so long had also produced a considerable number of disgruntled ex-employees. Before long, Shrivastava had located several who were willing to talk.

The testimony of these local thieves and middlemen was compelling, but inadequate as evidence. In some cases, the disappearance of idols had been registered with local police departments, but Shrivastava needed photographs of the pieces in the village temples from which they had been taken. Since the records of the Archaeological Survey and various state archeological authorities are woefully incomplete, Shrivastava began scouring libraries and archives in search of old photographs and archeological records. (Around this time, he also received a copy of Watson's book.) He sought out Ph.D. dissertations from the nineteen-sixties, many of which contained photographs of sculptures in their original temple settings. He concedes that his work became an obsession. "In my department, people said, 'You have gone mad! You are the man of archeology and art and culture.' And I was reading all the time and doing this bloody



"Are you open, emotionally?"

job," he said, chuckling. "This was my favorite hobby."

Occasionally, Shrivastava's research produced vivid illustrations of what was lost when a religious relic was smuggled out of India. He stumbled across a series of beautiful Matrika, or mother goddess, statues from outside Tanesar, a village near Udaipur. Originally, there were a dozen of the statues, each about two feet tall, carved from dark-green schist, and dating to the fifth century. They depicted graceful, broad-hipped women, each in a different stage of motherhood: one pregnant, one breast-feeding an infant, one cradling a toddler, one walking a child. An Indian archeological journal had published photographs of the Tanesar Matrikas in 1961. Sometime thereafter they were stolen and smuggled out of the country. In the late nineties, one of the statues appeared in a Sotheby's catalogue, and in February, 2003, Shrivastava assembled some photographs of the sculptures and travelled to Tanesar.

When the police contingent arrived at the village, a crowd formed. Shrivastava's men asked whether anyone remembered a series of statues of women that had once stood nearby. "We got hold of a person who was now eighty years old," Shrivastava told me. "Long white hair. Old guy." Shrivastava asked the man if he remembered the Matrikas, and after a

moment the man said, "Oh, yes, I recall, seven or eight idols were there of a lady, a lady feeding her child." Shrivastava took out the pictures of the Matrikas. The old man stared at them for a moment. Then he began to weep.

I asked what had become of the Matrikas, and Shrivastava told me that they had ended up in various museums in England and the United States. Today, one is at the British Museum, one is at the Cleveland Museum, and one is at the Met.

Vaman Ghiya's interrogation lasted ninety days. Initially, he was forced to share a cell with one of his middlemen, which he considered demeaning. He complained about the uncomfortable quarters and insisted on telephoning his doctor every day to discuss a number of ailments. Shrivastava was eager to carry out the interrogation, but Ghiya would break his silence only to say, "Why don't you tell me the name of your foreign bank account? I will send the money."

Shrivastava subjected Ghiya to long nights of questioning that began at 6 P.M. and continued until the morning. He describes his relationship with Ghiya during these sessions as somewhat jocular. "Obviously, he was doing illegal things. But it was art," he told me. "It was not a bank robbery, he was not Al Qaeda. He is a good conversationalist. But, at the

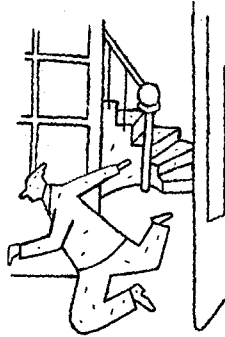
same time, he's very hard, very hard." After several days, Shrivastava tried taunting Ghiya, saying that it was his impression that Baliram Sharma was Ghiya's superior in the antiquities trade. "He has been arrested by the police several times," Ghiya replied. "This is the first time I have." And when Shrivastava asked why the auction world continued doing business with Ghiya after Watson's book and the dismissal of Brendan Lynch, Ghiya snapped back that he was indispensable. "They can survive without Brendan Lynch," he said. "But not without me."

Two weeks into the questioning, Ghiya began to open up. His confession, from which Shrivastava read aloud to me, was recorded by hand in Hindi in a series of lined blue notebooks, and describes a staggeringly sophisticated operation. Because of the free-trade zone and lax inspections in Switzerland, Ghiya shipped items through Geneva, where he maintained three shell corporations. These companies would buy and sell the objects among themselves, to launder the provenance, before forwarding them to auction houses and collectors elsewhere. The auction houses could claim to be accepting antiquities not from India but from a Swiss company that had bought them from another Swiss company—even if the companies shared the same business address and the antiques had been on Swiss soil for less than a week.

James Hodges had shown Peter Watson documents with the letterhead of two Swiss companies used by Ghiya, Cape Lion Logging and Megavena. Between 1984 and 1986, these two companies alone had consigned some ninety-three lots to Sotheby's sales. Sotheby's often paid his commission through a dummy bank account, Ghiya explained. To get cash back into India, Ghiya used *hawala*, a paperless money-remittance system that is widely used in India and by diasporic South Asian communities throughout the world, and is virtually untraceable.

After Sotheby's closed its London antiquities desk, in 1997, it simply shifted the business to New York, Ghiya told the police. A regal Jain Tirthankara that the police say Ghiya's men stole from Krishna

Vilas, an Archaeological Survey-protected site in Rajasthan, turned up as Lot 135 in Sotheby's September, 2000, catalogue, with an estimated price of twenty-five thousand to thirty-five thousand dollars. (A Sotheby's spokeswoman told me that the auction house has "not knowingly sold any items" consigned by Ghiya since 1997, and has "the most rigorous due-diligence program in the art market.") She



also said that Lot 135 was consigned by a New York dealer who to her knowledge has no connection to Ghiya.) Christie's also continued to auction material that he stole, Ghiya said. The police had recovered a photograph in Ghiya's secret cupboard depicting a scuffed sandstone Shiva, crowned with an elaborate headdress,

his hips thrust to the right and his four arms radiating around him. It perfectly matched the elegantly lit Shiva that Christie's auctioned in New York on September 20, 2000—down to the jagged right edge of the panel, where it had been pried from its original location. Ghiya said that he had met with representatives from Christie's as late as January, 2003. A Christie's spokeswoman told me that "Christie's does not comment on the identities of their clients." She added that the lot in question was consigned not by Ghiya but "by a reputable dealer," whose name she would not divulge, and maintained that Christie's "had no reason to believe that Mr. Ghiya had any connection" to the Shiva.

Ghiya eventually supplied Shrivastava with the names of dozens of his buyers in Britain, Switzerland, and the United States. He had an uncanny memory for the street addresses and collecting preferences of various prominent individuals with whom he had done business, and for the fate of many objects that had passed through his hands. Collectors often suggest that they are the custodians and preservers of antiquities that might otherwise suffer from neglect or mistreatment, but Ghiya described the callous mechanics that are sometimes required to smuggle a statue from one country to another. He recalled a squat stone Vahara—a depiction of Vishnu in his incarnation as a boar—that stood in the village of Attru, in southeast Rajasthan. The boar weighed more than a

thousand pounds and its legs and torso were covered in a magnificent phalanx of tiny, intricately carved figurines. Ghiya's thieves stole the statue in the late nineteen-eighties, lacing a chain through the boar's open mouth and yanking it from its stone pedestal, shearing off its lower jaw and breaking its legs in the process. The piece was eventually sold to a private collector in Zurich.

Ghiya was charged with "habitually" receiving stolen property and with the illegal possession and export of antiquities. Indian courts operate at a sluggish pace, and the trial, which has been under way for more than a year, is expected to continue for at least another year. Journalists are barred from the courtroom, but Abhay Singh said that during the several days that he testified against his former employer Ghiya was alert and engaged, following every word. Despite his detailed confession, Ghiya pleaded not guilty. Torture and coercive interrogation are such a common feature of the Indian criminal-justice system that confessions given to police officers are not admissible in court. When I asked Shrivastava and another officer who was involved in the interrogations whether Ghiya had been tortured, they both dismissed any suggestion of cruel treatment as the time-worn refrain of criminal defendants everywhere. But Ghiya's supporters, and others who have followed the case, maintain that it would be more unusual if the police had *not* physically coerced Ghiya's confession than if they had.

What Vaman did was he created a sort of aura," a Rajasthan textiles dealer told me. Ghiya awakened Indians to the value of their cultural heritage, the dealer explained, by demonstrating the prices that outsiders were willing to pay for it. "He made the market something fantastic."

We were drinking milky tea in the cramped back room of a small shop in Jaipur's old quarter, along with four other men. The men were jumpy. They peered suspiciously at several drivers lounging on their auto-rickshaws under a tree in front of the shop, and asked if I had been followed; they repeatedly insisted that I not use any of their names. Sandipan Sharma, an Indian journalist, had warned me that in the Jaipur art world antique dealing is "like doping in athletics"—ev-

everyone dabbles in it, and everyone denies doing so. Sure enough, none of the men would say that they dealt antiques. One told me that his main business was jewelry; another insisted that he was a goldsmith. "After this case, everybody says, 'I sell only handicrafts,'" one man joked. The others laughed nervously.

The antiquities law has many critics. "The law as it stands doesn't benefit anybody," said the scholar and curator Pratapaditya Pal, who came to the United States in the mid-nineteen-sixties and built several renowned collections, including Norton Simon's. The law is self-defeating, Pal believes, because it makes no distinction between a masterpiece and any generic antique. The result is a black market that the government lacks the resources to control. Pal prefers the model adopted by Japan, which identifies art works of national significance and keeps them in the country, while allowing everything else to be sold on the open market. The difference between what Walter Benjamin called "cult value" and "exhibition value" makes the issue particularly vexed in India. Indians who are involved in the art world frequently express frustration that their countrymen have little interest in the purely artistic value of religious art. "We may be very advanced in the Internet and outsourcing and all that," Pal said. "But I see absolutely no response to antiquities of any kind among any of the people I meet [in India], and I meet only the educated, upper crust."

It is not clear what will become of the thousands of art works that the police say Ghiya smuggled out of the country between the nineteen-seventies and his capture. A dispute between the Archaeological Survey and the state government in Rajasthan over who would underwrite the cost of returning the art seems to have stalled the prospect of recovery. Even if works are returned, it is not clear where precisely they would go. Pal pointed out that, even after the Indian government spent enormous sums to secure the return of Norton Simon's bronze Nataraja in the seventies, the sculpture—which is considered one of the masterpieces of Indian art—was neither restored to the temple from which it had been stolen nor displayed in a museum.

The police ultimately unearthed some nine hundred antiques in Ghi-

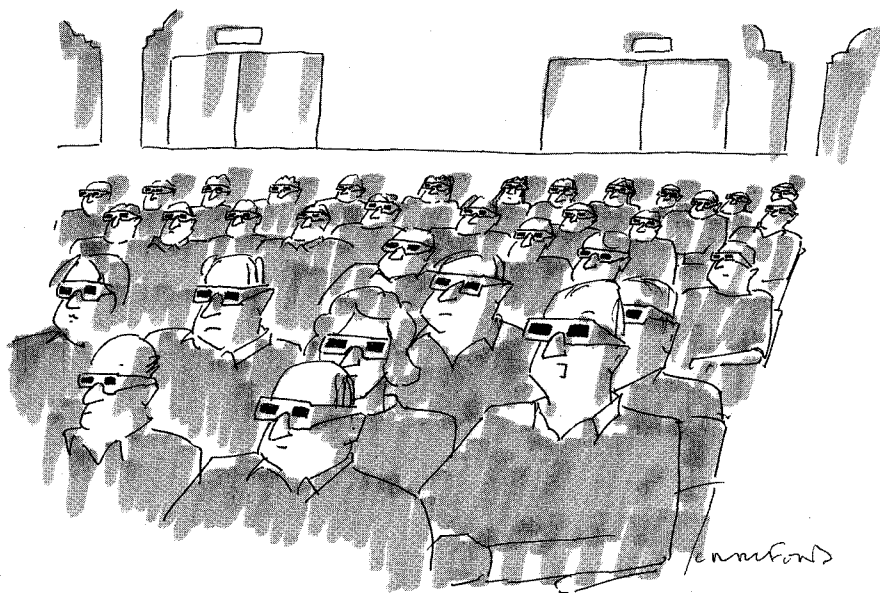
ya's various godowns around India, and trucked them back to Jaipur. Today, they inhabit a storage space at Jaipur's Vidhyadhar Nagar police station. Officials have announced a plan to assemble all the recovered treasures into a permanent exhibit—a sort of Ghiya Collection of South Asian Art—which would be displayed at Hawa Mahal, Jaipur's beautiful, tapering Palace of Winds, in the heart of the Pink City. I visited Hawa Mahal, the façade of which is a lacy scrim of pink sandstone, perforated with hundreds of tiny windows through which nineteenth-century noblewomen could watch street festivals without being seen. There I met Zafar Ullah Khan, who has been assigned to curate the exhibit. Each sculpture had been photographed before being placed in storage, and, as we flipped through huge stacks of these black-and-white pictures, Khan told me that one day all of the sculptures would be on display. But, for the time being, they must stay in storage. The Palace of Winds needs a burglar alarm and closed-circuit security cameras. They couldn't possibly display so precious a trove of antiquities in so unguarded a space.

One enduring mystery is why a man of Ghiya's means has been unable to bribe his way out of prison. Ariane Dandois heard rumors in Jaipur that Ghiya had powerful enemies. "He had become very rich, very arrogant, and had problems with highly important people," she said. "You know, it's a

mafia. Clearly, some people wanted him out of the market."

But the authorities may simply be sending a message. "When Ghiya was put behind bars, there was a lot of terror," Shrivastava told me late one night, as we sat on the deserted terrace of a sumptuous palace that had been reinvented as a posh hotel. The walls were hung with fading photographs of early-twentieth-century shooting parties: stern-faced maharajas and visiting British aristocrats standing triumphant over a mountain of slain ducks; a Rolls-Royce with a dead tiger splayed along its running board, and the caption "Silver Shadow and Tiger."

Ghiya's operation was the largest antiquities smuggling racket in India's history to be systematically dismantled and prosecuted, and, depending on the outcome of the trial, Ghiya could spend the rest of his life in jail. Shrivastava said that for three years after Ghiya's arrest other smugglers left the business and the outflow of antiquities had been stemmed. "But now I have come to know that again they have started," he told me. Bats made lazy figure eights in the air around us, splashing off the surface of the swimming pool. On a low rooftop in the distance, hotel employees spread out blankets and prepared to sleep beneath the stars. "This is a very specialized kind of crime. You have to have a lot of taste. You have to read a lot," Shrivastava said. "These new guys, they have taken all the lessons from Ghiya. They are taking more precautions." ♦

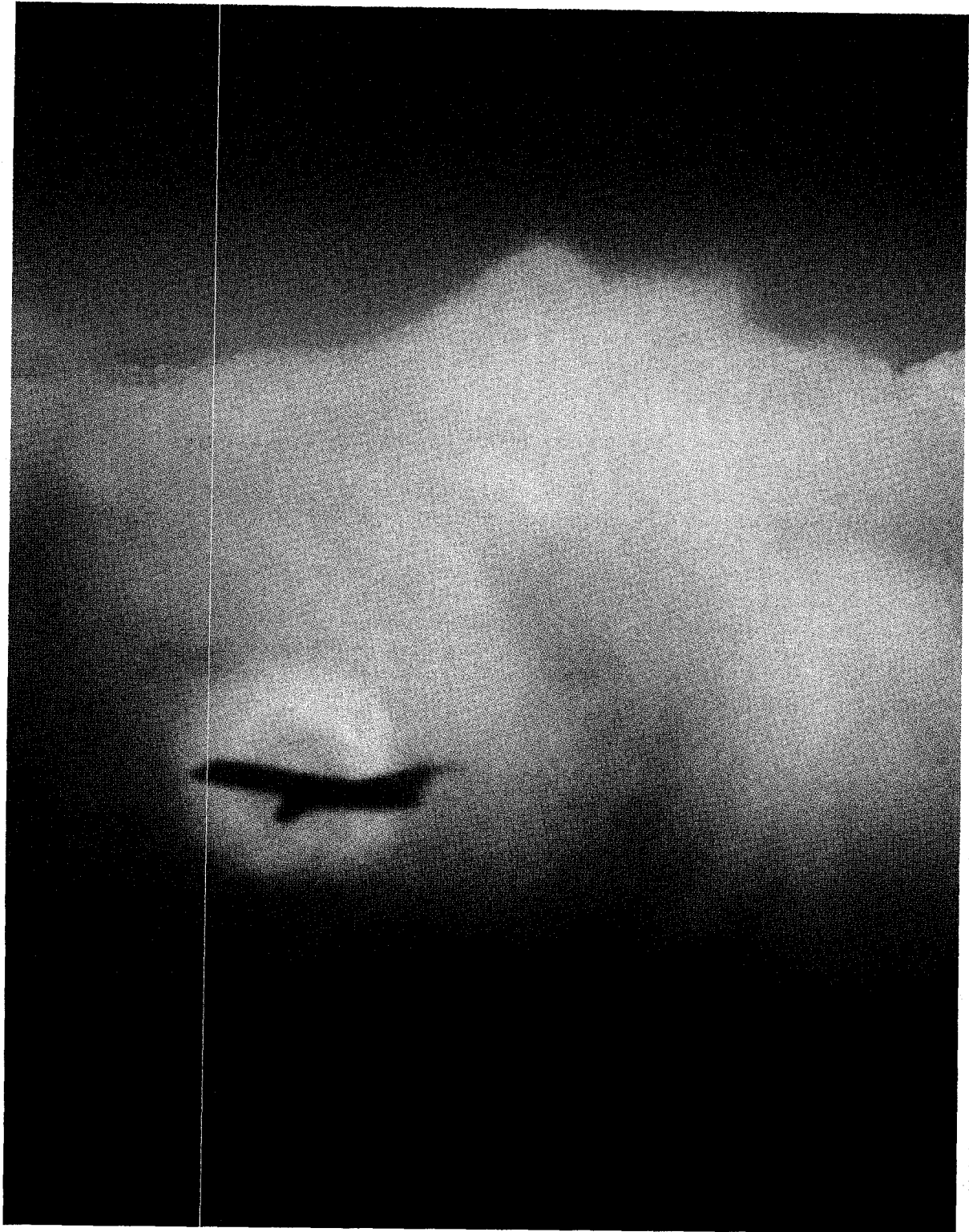


"Remind me to take these off when I go to the men's room."

FICTION

ONE MINUS ONE

BY COLM TÓIBÍN



The moon hangs low over Texas. The moon is my mother. She is full tonight, and brighter than the brightest neon; there are folds of red in her vast amber. Maybe she is a harvest moon, a Comanche moon, I do not know. I have never seen a moon so low and so full of her own deep brightness. My mother is six years dead tonight, and Ireland is six hours away and you are asleep.

I am walking. No one else is walking. It is hard to cross Guadalupe; the cars come fast. In the Community Whole Food Store, where all are welcome, the girl at the checkout asks me if I would like to join the store's club. If I pay seventy dollars, my membership, she says, will never expire, and I will get a seven-percent discount on all purchases.

Six years. Six hours. Seventy dollars. Seven per cent. I tell her I am here for a few months only, and she smiles and says that I am welcome. I smile back. I can still smile. If I called you now, it would be half two in the morning; you could easily be awake.

If I called, I could go over everything that happened six years ago. Because that is what is on my mind tonight, as though no time had elapsed, as though the strength of the moonlight had by some fierce magic chosen tonight to carry me back to the last real thing that happened to me. On the phone to you across the Atlantic, I could go over the days surrounding my mother's funeral. I could go over all the details as though I were in danger of forgetting them. I could remind you, for example, that you wore a white shirt at the funeral. It must have been warm enough not to wear a jacket. I remember that I could see you when I spoke about her from the altar, that you were over in the side aisle, on the left. I remember that you, or someone, said that you had parked your car almost in front of the cathedral because you had come late from Dublin and could not find parking anywhere else. I know that you moved your car before the hearse came after Mass to take my mother's coffin to the graveyard, with all of us walking behind. You came to the hotel once she was in the ground, and you stayed for a meal with me and Suzie, my sister. Joe, her husband, must have been near, and Cathal, my brother, but I don't remember what they did when the meal was over and the crowd had dispersed. I know that as the meal came to an end a

friend of my mother's, who noticed everything, came over and looked at you and whispered to me that it was nice that my friend had come. She used the word "friend" with a sweet, insinuating emphasis. I did not tell her that what she had noticed was no longer there, was part of the past. I simply said, yes, it was nice that you had come.

You know that you are the only person who shakes his head in exasperation when I insist on making jokes and small talk, when I refuse to be direct. No one else has ever minded this as you do. You are alone in wanting me always to say something that is true. I know now, as I walk toward the house I have rented here, that if I called and told you that the bitter past has come back to me tonight in these alien streets with a force that feels like violence, you would say that you are not surprised. You would wonder only why it has taken six years.

I was living in New York then, the city about to enter its last year of innocence. I had a new apartment there, just as I had a new apartment everywhere I went. It was on Ninetieth and Columbus. You never saw it. It was a mistake. I think it was a mistake. I didn't stay there long—six or seven months—but it was the longest I stayed anywhere in those years or the years that followed. The apartment needed to be furnished, and I spent two or three days taking pleasure in the sharp bite of buying things: two easy chairs that I later sent back to Ireland; a leather sofa from Bloomingdale's, which I eventually gave to one of my students; a big bed from 1-800-Mattress; a table and some chairs from a place downtown; a cheap desk from the thrift shop.

And all those days—a Friday, a Saturday, and a Sunday, at the beginning of September—as I was busy with delivery times, credit cards, and the whiz of taxis from store to store, my mother was dying and no one could find me. I had no cell phone, and the phone line in the apartment had not been connected. I used the pay phone on the corner if I needed to make calls. I gave the delivery companies a friend's phone number, in case they had to let me know when they would come with my furniture. I phoned my friend a few times a day, and she came shopping with me sometimes and she was fun and I enjoyed those days. The days when no

one in Ireland could find me to tell me that my mother was dying.

Eventually, late on the Sunday night, I slipped into a Kinko's and went online and found that Suzie had left me message after message, starting three days before, marked "Urgent", or "Are you there" or "Please reply" or "Please acknowledge receipt" and then just "Please!!!" I read one of them, and I replied to say that I would call as soon as I could find a phone, and then I read the rest of them one by one. My mother was in the hospital. She might have to have an operation. Suzie wanted to talk to me. She was staying at my mother's house. There was nothing more in any of them, the urgency being not so much in their tone as in their frequency and the different titles she gave to each e-mail that she sent.

I woke her in the night in Ireland. I imagined her standing in the hall at the bottom of the stairs. I would love to say that Suzie told me my mother was asking for me, but she said nothing like that. She spoke instead about the medical details and how she herself had been told the news that our mother was in the hospital and how she had despaired of ever finding me. I told her that I would call again in the morning, and she said that she would know more then. My mother was not in pain now, she said, although she had been. I did not tell her that my classes would begin in three days, because I did not need to. That night, it sounded as though she wanted just to talk to me, to tell me. Nothing more.

But in the morning when I called I realized that she had put quick thought into it as soon as she heard my voice on the phone, that she had known I could not make arrangements to leave for Dublin late on a Sunday night, that there would be no flights until the next evening; she had decided to say nothing until the morning. She had wanted me to have an easy night's sleep. And I did, and in the morning when I phoned she said simply that there would come a moment very soon when the family would have to decide. She spoke about *the family* as though it were as distant as the urban district council or the government or the United Nations, but she knew and I knew that there were just the three of us. We were the family, and there is only one thing that a family is ever asked to decide in a hospital. I told her that I would come home; I

would get the next flight. I would not be in my new apartment for some of the furniture deliveries, and I would not be at the university for my first classes. Instead, I would find a flight to Dublin, and I would see her as soon as I could. My friend phoned Aer Lingus and discovered that a few seats were kept free for eventualities like this. I could fly out that evening.

You know that I do not believe in God. I do not care much about the mysteries of the universe, unless they come to me in words, or in music maybe, or in a set of colors, and then I entertain them merely for their beauty and only briefly. I do not even believe in Ireland. But you know, too, that in these years of being away there are times when Ireland comes to me in a sudden guise, when I see a hint of something familiar that I want and need. I see someone coming toward me, with a soft way of smiling, or a stubborn uneasy face, or a way of moving warily through a public place, or a raw, almost resentful stare into the middle distance. In any case, I went to J.F.K. that evening, and I saw them as soon as I got out of the taxi: a middle-aged couple pushing a trolley that had too much luggage on it, the man looking fearful and mild, as though he might be questioned by someone at any moment and not know how to defend himself, and the woman harassed and weary, her clothes too colorful, her heels too high, her mouth set in pure, blind determination, but her eyes humbly watchful, undefiant.

I could easily have spoken to them and told them why I was going home and they both would have stopped and asked me where I was from, and they would have nodded with understanding when I spoke. Even the young men in the queue to check in, going home for a quick respite—just looking at their tentative stance and standing in their company saying nothing, that brought ease with it. I could breathe for a while without worry, without having to think. I, too, could look like them, as though I owned nothing, or nothing much, and were ready to smile softly or keep my distance without any arrogance if someone said, "Excuse me," or if an official approached.

When I picked up my ticket, and went to the check-in desk, I was told to go to the other desk, which looked after business class. It occurred to me, as I took my

bag over, that it might be airline policy to comfort those who were going home for reasons such as mine with an upgrade, to cosset them through the night with quiet sympathy and an extra blanket or something. But when I got to the desk I knew why I had been sent there, and I wondered about God and Ireland, because the woman at the desk had seen my name being added to the list and had told the others that she knew me and would like to help me now that I needed help.

Her name was Frances Carey, and she had lived next door to my aunt's house, where we—myself and Cathal—were left when my father got sick. I was eight years old then. Frances must have been ten years older, but I remember her well, as I do her sister and her two brothers, one of whom was close to me in age. Their family owned the house that my aunt lived in, the aunt who took us in. They were grander than she was and much richer, but she had become friendly with them, and there was, since the houses shared a large back garden and some outhouses, a lot of traffic between the two establishments.

Cathal was four then, but in his mind he was older. He was learning to read already, he was clever and had a prodigious memory, and was treated as a young boy in our house rather than as a baby; he could decide which clothes to wear each day and what television he wanted to watch and which room he would sit in and what food he would eat. When his friends called at the house, he could freely ask them in, or go out with them. When relatives or friends of my parents called, they asked for him, too, and spoke to him and listened avidly to what he had to say.

In all the years that followed, Cathal and I never once spoke about our time in this new house with this new family. And my memory, usually so good, is not always clear. I cannot remember, for example, how we got to the house, who drove us there, or what this person said. I know that I was eight years old only because I remember what class I was in at school when I left and who the teacher was. It is possible that this period lasted just two or three months. Maybe it was more. It was not summer, I am sure of that, because Suzie, who remained unscathed by all of this (or so she said, when once, years ago, I asked her if she remembered it), was back at boarding school. I have no memory of cold

weather in that house in which we were deposited, although I do think that the evenings were dark early. Maybe it was from September to December. Or the first months after Christmas. I am not sure.

What I remember clearly is the rooms themselves, the parlor and dining room almost never used and the kitchen, larger than ours at home, and the smell and taste of fried bread. I hated the hot thick slices, fresh from the pan, soaked in lard or dripping. I remember that our cousins were younger than we were and had to sleep during the day, or at least one of them did, and we had to be quiet for hours on end, even though we had nothing to do; we had none of our toys or books. I remember that nobody liked us, either of us, not even Cathal, who, before and after this event, was greatly loved by people who came across him.

We slept in my aunt's house and ate her food as best we could, and we must have played or done something, although we never went to school. Nobody did us any harm in that house; nobody came near us in the night, or hit either of us, or threatened us, or made us afraid. The time we were left by our mother in our aunt's house has no drama attached to it. It was all grayness, strangeness. Our aunt dealt with us in her own distracted way. Her husband was mild, distant, almost good-humored.

And all I know is that our mother did not get in touch with us once, not once, during this time. There was no letter or phone call or visit. Our father was in the hospital. We did not know how long we were going to be left there. In the years that followed, our mother never explained her absence, and we never asked her if she had ever wondered how we were, or how we felt, during those months.

This should be nothing, because it resembled nothing, just as one minus one resembles zero. It should be barely worth recounting to you as I walk the empty streets of this city in the desert so far away from where I belong. It feels as though Cathal and I had spent that time in the shadow world, as though we had been quietly lowered into the dark, everything familiar missing, and nothing we did or said could change this. Because no one gave any sign of hating us, it did not strike us that we were in a world where no one loved us, or that such a thing might matter. We did not complain. We were emptied of everything,

and in the vacuum came something like silence—almost no sound at all, just some sad echoes and dim feelings.

I promise you that I will not call. I have called you enough, and woken you enough times, in the years when we were together and in the years since then. But there are nights now in this strange, flat, and forsaken place when those sad echoes and dim feelings come to me slightly louder than before. They are like whispers, or trapped whimpering sounds. And I wish that I had you here, and I wish that I had not called you all those other times when I did not need to as much as I do now.

My brother and I learned not to trust anyone. We learned then not to talk about things that mattered to us, and we stuck to this, as much as we could, with a sort of grim stubborn pride, all our lives, as though it were a skill. But you know that, don't you? I do not need to call you to tell you that.

At J.F.K. that night, Frances Carey smiled warmly and asked me how bad things were. When I told her that my mother was dying, she said that she was shocked. She remembered my mother so well, she said. She said she was sorry. She explained that I could use the first-class lounge, making it clear, however, in the most pleasant way, that I would be crossing the Atlantic in coach, which was what I had paid for. If I needed her, she said, she could come up in a while and talk, but she had told the people in the lounge and on the plane that she knew me, and they would look after me.

As we spoke and she tagged my luggage and gave me my boarding pass, I guessed that I had not laid eyes on her for more than thirty years. But in her face I could see the person I had known, as well as traces of her mother and one of her brothers. In her presence—the reminder she offered of that house where Cathal and I had been left all those years ago—I could feel that this going home to my mother's bedside would not be simple, that some of our loves and attachments are elemental and beyond our choosing, and for that very reason they come spiced with pain and regret and need and hollowness and a feeling as close to anger as I will ever be able to manage.

Sometime during the night in that plane, as we crossed part of the Western Hemisphere, quietly and, I hope, unno-



ticed, I began to cry. I was back then in the simple world before I had seen Frances Carey, a world in which someone whose heartbeat had once been mine, and whose blood became my blood, and inside whose body I once lay curled, herself lay stricken in a hospital bed. The fear of losing her made me desperately sad. And then I tried to sleep. I pushed back my seat as the night wore on and kept my eyes averted from the movie being shown, whatever it was, and let the terrible business of what I was flying toward hit me.

I hired a car at the airport, and I drove across Dublin in the washed light of that early September morning. I drove through Drumcondra, Dorset Street, Mountjoy Square, Gardiner Street, and the streets across the river that led south, as though they were a skin that I had shed. I did not stop for two hours or more, until I reached the house, fearing that if I pulled up somewhere to have breakfast the numbness that the driving with no sleep had brought might lift.

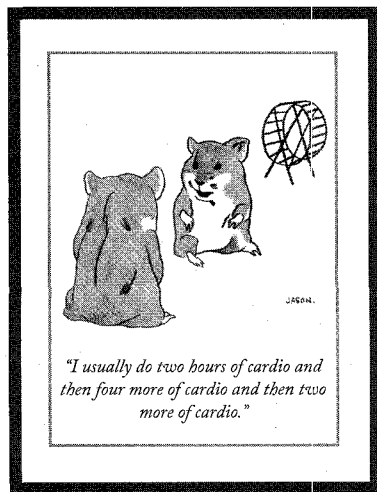
Suzie was just out of bed when I arrived, and Jim was still asleep. Cathal had gone back to Dublin the night before, she said, but would be down later. She sighed and looked at me. The hospital had phoned, she went on, and things were worse. Your mother, she said, had a stroke during the night, on top of everything else. It was an old joke between us: never "our mother" or "my mother" or "Mammy" or "Mummy," but "your mother."

The doctors did not know how bad the stroke had been, she said, and they were still ready to operate if they thought they could. But they needed to talk to us. It was a pity, she added, that our mother's specialist, the man who looked after her heart, and whom she saw regularly and liked, was away. I realized then why Cathal had gone back to Dublin—he did not want to be a part of the conversation that we would have with the doctors. Two of us would be enough. He had told Suzie to tell me that whatever we decided would be fine with him.

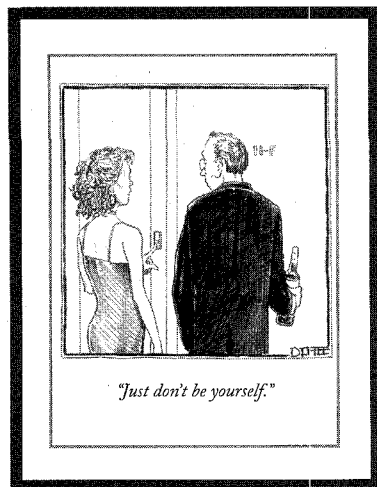
Neither of us blamed him. He was the one who had become close to her. He was the one she loved most. Or maybe he was the only one she loved. In those years, anyway. Or maybe that is unfair. Maybe she loved us all, just as we loved her as she lay dying.

And I moved, in those days—that Tuesday morning to the Friday night when she died—from feeling at times a great remoteness from her to wanting fiercely, almost in the same moment, my mother back where she had always been, in witty command of her world, full of odd dreams and perspectives, difficult, ready for life. She loved, as I did, books and music and hot weather. As she grew older she had managed, with her friends and with us, a pure charm, a lightness of tone and touch. But I knew not to trust it, not to come close, and I never did. I managed, in turn, to exude my own lightness and

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charm, but you know that, too. You don't need me to tell you that, either, do you?

I regretted nonetheless, as I sat by her bed or left so that others might see her—I regretted how far I had moved away from her, and how far away I had stayed. I regretted how much I had let those months apart from her in the limbo of my aunt's house, and the years afterward, as my father slowly died, eat away at my soul. I regretted how little she knew about me, as she, too, must have regretted that, although she never complained or mentioned it, except perhaps to Cathal, and he told no one anything. Maybe she regretted nothing. But nights are long in winter, when darkness comes down at four o'clock and people have time to think of everything.

Maybe that is why I am here now, away from Irish darkness, away from the long, deep winter that settles so menacingly on the place where I was born. I am away from the east wind. I am in a place where so much is empty because it was never full, where things are forgotten and swept away, if there ever were things. I am in a place where there is nothing. Flatness, a blue sky, a soft, unhaunted night. A place where no one walks. Maybe I am happier here than I would be anywhere else, and it is only the poisonous innocence of the moon tonight that has made me want to dial your number and see if you are awake.

As we drove to see my mother that morning, I could not ask Suzie a question that was on my mind. My mother had been sick for four days now and was lying there maybe frightened, and I wondered if she had reached out her hand to Cathal and if they had held hands in the hospital, if they had actually grown close enough for that. Or if she had made some gesture to Suzie. And if she might do the same to me. It was a stupid, selfish thing I wondered about, and, like everything else that came into my mind in those days, it allowed me to avoid the fact that there would be no time anymore for anything to be explained or said. We had used up all our time. And I wondered if that made any difference to my mother then, as she lay awake in the hospital those last few nights of her life: we had used up all our time.

She was in intensive care. We had to ring the bell and wait to be admitted. There was a hush over the place. We had

discussed what I would say to her so as not to alarm her, how I would explain why I had come back. I told Suzie that I would simply say that I'd heard she was in the hospital and I'd had a few days free before classes began and had decided to come back to make sure that she was O.K.

"Are you feeling better?" I asked her.

She could not speak. Slowly and laboriously, she let us know that she was thirsty and they would not allow her to drink anything. She had a drip in her arm. We told the nurses that her mouth was dry, and they said that there was nothing much we could do, except perhaps take tiny drops of cold water and put them on her lips using those special little sticks with cotton-wool tips that women use to put on eye makeup.

I sat by her bed and spent a while wetting her lips. I was at home with her now. I knew how much she hated physical discomfort; her appetite for this water was so overwhelming and so desperate that nothing else mattered.

And then word came that the doctors would see us. When we stood up and told her that we would be back, she hardly responded. We were ushered by a nurse with an English accent down some corridors to a room. There were two doctors there; the nurse stayed in the room. The doctor who seemed to be in charge, who said that he would have been the one to perform the operation, told us that he had just spoken to the anesthetist, who had insisted that my mother's heart would not survive an operation. The stroke did not really matter, he said, although it did not help.

"I could have a go," he said, and then immediately apologized for speaking like that. He corrected himself: "I could operate, but she would die on the operating table."

There was a blockage somewhere, he said. There was no blood getting to her kidneys and maybe elsewhere as well—the operation would tell us for certain, but it would probably do nothing to solve the problem. It was her circulation, he said. The heart was simply not beating strongly enough to send blood into every part of her body.

He knew to leave silence then, and the other doctor did, too. The nurse looked at the floor.

"There's nothing you can do then, is there?" I said.

"We can make her comfortable," he replied.

"How long can she survive like this?" I asked.

"Not long," he said.

"I mean, hours or days?"

"Days. Some days."

"We can make her very comfortable," the nurse said.

There was nothing more to say. Afterward, I wondered if we should have spoken to the anesthetist personally, or tried to contact our mother's consultant, or asked that she be moved to a bigger hospital for another opinion. But I don't think any of this would have made a difference. For years, we had been given warnings that this moment would come, as she fainted in public places and lost her balance and declined. It had been clear that her heart was giving out, but not clear enough for me to have come to see her more than once or twice in the summer—and then when I did come I was protected from what might have been said, or not said, by the presence of Suzie and Jim and Cathal. Maybe I should have phoned a few times a week, or written her letters like a good son. But despite all the warning signals, or perhaps even because of them, I had kept my distance. And as soon as I entertained this thought, with all the regret that it carried, I imagined how coldly or nonchalantly a decision to spend the summer close by, seeing her often, might have been greeted by her, and how difficult and enervating for her, as much as for me, some of those visits or phone calls might have been. And how curtly efficient and brief her letters in reply to mine would have seemed.

And, as we walked back down to see her, the nurse coming with us, there was this double regret—the simple one that I had kept away, and the other one, much harder to fathom, that I had been given no choice, that she had never wanted me very much, and that she was not going to be able to rectify that in the few days that she had left in the world. She would be distracted by her own pain and discomfort, and by the great effort she was making to be dignified and calm. She was wonderful, as she always had been. I touched her hand a few times in case she might open it and seek my hand, but she never did this. She did not respond to being touched.

Some of her friends came. Cathal

came and stayed with her. Suzie and I remained close by. On Friday morning, when the nurse asked me if I thought she was in distress, I said that I did. I knew that, if I insisted now, I could get her morphine and a private room. I did not consult the others; I knew that they would agree. I did not mention morphine to the nurse, but I knew that she was wise, and I saw by the way she looked at me as I spoke that she knew that I knew what morphine would do. It would ease my mother into sleep and ease her out of the world. Her breathing would come and go, shallow and deep, her pulse would become faint, her breathing would stop, and then come and go again.

It would come and go until, in that private room late in the evening, it seemed to stop altogether, as, horrified and helpless, we sat and watched her, then sat up straight as the breathing started again, but not for long. Not for long at all. It stopped one last time, and it stayed stopped. It did not start again.

She was gone. She lay still. We sat with her until a nurse came in and quietly checked her pulse and shook her head sadly and left the room.

We stayed with her for a while; then, when they asked us to leave, we touched her on the forehead one by one, and we left the room, closing the door. We walked down the corridor as though for the rest of our lives our own breathing would bear traces of the end of hers, of her final struggle, as though our own way of being in the world had just been halved or quartered by what we had seen.

We buried her beside my father, who had been in the grave waiting for her for thirty-three years. And the next morning I flew back to New York, to my half-furnished apartment on Columbus and Ninetieth, and began my teaching a day later. I understood, just as you might tell me now—if you picked up the phone and found me on the other end of the line, silent at first and then saying that I needed to talk to you—you might tell me that I had over all the years postponed too much. As I settled down to sleep in that new bed in the dark city, I saw that it was too late now, too late for everything. I would not be given a second chance. In the hours when I woke, I have to tell you that this struck me almost with relief. ♦



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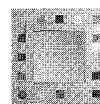
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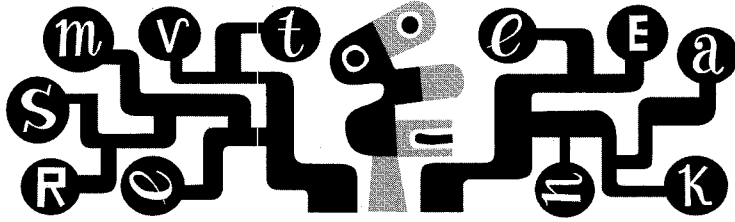
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THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

IN THE TERRITORY

A look at the life of Ralph Ellison.

BY HILTON ALS

November 29, 1967, a tart, sunny day in Plainfield, Massachusetts, some thirty miles north of Smith College, in the Berkshires: the small town's most famous inhabitant that historic afternoon was not, as one would expect, a New England patrician with an ancestral foot planted firmly on Plymouth Rock. Rather, it was a fifty-four-year-old well-dressed black Oklahoman, the owner of a two-story house on Lincoln Hill Road, who had been named for another New England writer: Ralph Waldo Ellison.

Ellison's first—and only completed—novel, the 1952 surrealist epic “Invisible Man,” is now regarded by many as one of the ur-texts on urban black masculinity. (From the prologue: “I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. . . . I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.”) But when it was first published its critics in the white literary establishment emphasized not the book's specificity but its broad appeal. In *Commentary*, Saul Bellow wrote, “There is a way for Negro novelists to go at their problems, just as there are Jewish or Italian ways. Mr. Ellison has not adopted a minority tone. If he had done so, he would have failed to establish a true middle-of-consciousness for everyone.”

Certainly by 1967 no one would have referred to Ellison as a “minority” writer. (Except in the way that he himself used the term, in a 1955 *Paris Review* interview: “All novels are about certain minorities: the individual is a minority.”)

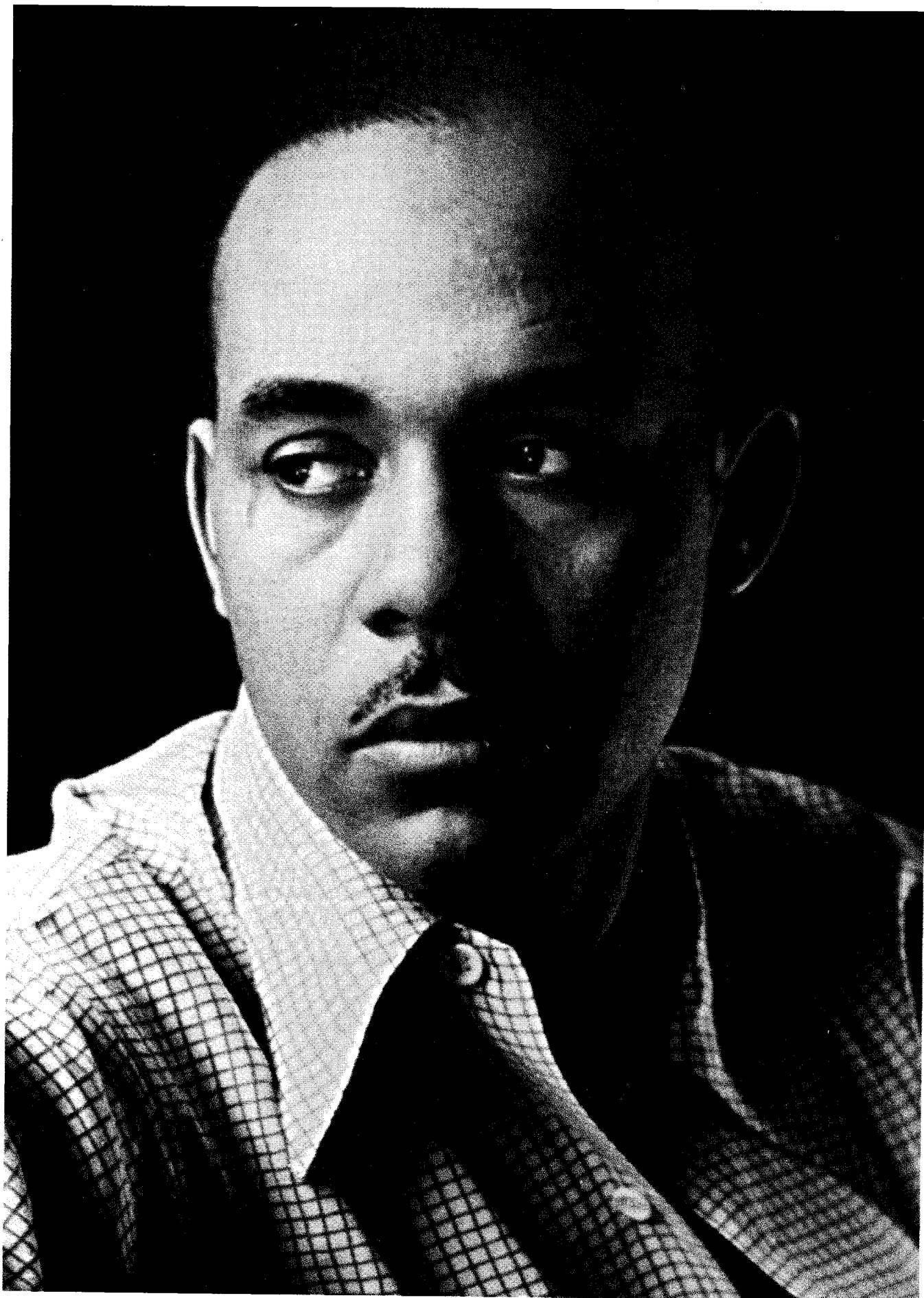
“Invisible Man” had beat out Hemingway's “The Old Man and the Sea” to win the 1953 National Book Award. In 1965, a group of prominent critics, writers, and publishers had voted it the “most distinguished” postwar American novel. By the time Ellison died, in 1994, the novel had inspired more than twenty book-length critical studies. Despite the accolades, though, every time Ellison received another prize for “Invisible Man” he had to face the inevitable question: where was his second novel? The move to Plainfield, in 1967, with his wife, Fanny, was supposed to provide him with an environment in which to finish the book, later titled “Juneteenth.” But, as Arnold Rampersad, the scholar and biographer of Langston Hughes and Jackie Robinson, reports in his startling, illuminating, and sad biography, “Ralph Ellison” (Knopf; \$35), although the Ellisons had bought a small estate there, Fanny had trouble prying her husband away from Manhattan. That November day in 1967 was one of the few that Ellison actually spent on the property.

According to Rampersad, two handymen showed up in the afternoon to replace some doors on the toolshed. The Ellisons left to run some errands. Returning home after the handymen had gone, they saw smoke billowing from their house. The manuscript of “Juneteenth” was destroyed in the fire. In the years that followed, Rampersad writes, Ellison and his wife “soon fell back reflexively on the fire when asked about the delay” with the second novel. At one point, Fanny even

blamed the blaze on racist arsonists. On other occasions, she spoke about having to be “restrained by firemen from rushing into the burning house to rescue the manuscript, which she could see clearly, so very clearly, through a window as the flames closed in.” It is uncertain how much of the book had been written when it was lost, but the tragedy became the defining event of the latter part of Ellison's life.

Ellison had an American penchant for complaint. Born on March 1, 1913, he was the second son of Lewis and Ida Ellison. (Their first, Alfred, had died in infancy. Ellison's younger brother, Herbert, was born in 1916.) The couple had met in Lewis's home town, Abbeville, South Carolina—Ida, who was born in Georgia, had gone to school there—and were married in 1910; the same year, they, like thousands of other prewar blacks, left the South to stake their claim in “the territory,” settling in Oklahoma. “Divided and united by history, Oklahoma was culturally the wild West, the Southwest, and the Old South,” Rampersad writes. “It was ancient but also brazenly new.” As an adult, Ellison, forever the proud Oklahoman, often cited his upbringing among blacks, whites, Jews, and Native Americans as the source of his integrationist view of America. In Oklahoma City, Lewis found employment as a laborer, an itinerant construction worker, and a foreman, before becoming an ice-and-coal deliveryman. In 1916, while the thirty-nine-year-old Lewis was hoisting a block of ice up the front steps of a general store, a shard of ice broke off, piercing his stomach. He died at the hospital.

Rampersad points out that the loss of Ellison's father remained a wound in his consciousness for the rest of his life. Lewis did not leave much by way of worldly possessions for his three-year-old son, but he had, through his choice of names, tried to initiate young Ralph Waldo into a rich tradition; like many other black Americans, Lewis had taken comfort in Emerson's transcendentalist views. His son, however, inherited little of Emerson's interest in meditative tranquillity. “Anger was a problem,” Rampersad writes, “as it would be for the rest of his life, although he learned to control it. In kindergarten one day, he shocked both himself and a teacher who tried to awaken him by slapping her hand.” One could argue that El-



Ellison in the mid-fifties. "So much of what I've become was formed in Okla[homa]," he wrote. Photograph by Gordon Parks.

lison never learned to control his anger, which he reserved, for the most part, for the women in his life. Ida, destitute after Lewis's death, took whatever work came her way—as a maid, a cleaning woman, a babysitter—in order to support her sons. Ellison was generally ungrateful for these sacrifices. He scoffed at his mother's Christian charity, her softness. "To Ralph's bemusement and sometimes anger, she fed the hoboes, most of them white, who came to their back door looking for a handout," Rampersad writes.

In 1921, Ida and her children decamped for Gary, Indiana, where one of her brothers worked. Ellison later recalled the move as having been precipitated by his mother's feeling that "my brother and I would have a better chance of reaching manhood if we grew up in the north." But nothing went well in Gary: Ida didn't find work, and her brother lost his job. The Ellisons lived on worm-infested beans and stale bread until rescue came in the form of the Cooks, a rich black family from Oklahoma, who were passing through Indiana on their way back to the territory. The Ellisons hitched a ride. Years later, Ellison wrote to Hester Cook, the family's matriarch, "I realize now that that was one of the most important trips of my life; because Lord knows what might have happened to us had we remained in Gary. . . . So much of what I've become was formed in Okla." Also formed in Oklahoma was Ellison's intractable snobbery. As a boy, he was far more attracted to the rich families Ida worked for—and who later employed him as an errand boy—than to the life he found at home. In an interview included in "Shadow and Act," Ellison's 1964 essay collection, he recalled:

As a kid I remember working it out this way: there was a world in which you wore your everyday clothes on Sunday, and there was a world in which you wore your Sunday clothes every day—I wanted the world in which you wore your Sunday clothes every day. I wanted it because it represented something better, a more exciting and civilized and human way of living. . . . I sometimes [glimpsed this world] through the windows of great houses on Sunday afternoons when my mother took my brother and me for walks through the wealthy white sections of the city. . . . And for me none of this was hopelessly beyond the reach of my Negro world, really; because if you worked and you fought for your rights, and so on, you could finally achieve it. This involved our American Negro faith in education, of course, and the idea of self-cultivation—although I couldn't have put it that way.

TARA

She stood by the door
of her Virginia farm
pulling a sweater on
the branches
of the dogwood
she had tended
were bowed
blossoms loosened
tossed in sudden snow
the deer stood
in mute wonder
by her garden's edge
she slipped the phone
in her pocket
her daughter
unharméd
among
petals gone
she snapped
a branch
a tempest stalled
she felt the boy
she felt the dead
she felt the families
she felt the wind
the deer don't do that
she said
the deer don't do that

—Patti Smith

It is difficult to imagine a poor black child of Ellison's era who did not suspect that his race and circumstances might in some way hold him back. But Ellison was strongly influenced by Ida's faith in her children's ability to rise above their origins. "How often did I hear my mother insist that the future of African-Americans would depend upon our generation of young Negroes—and this at a time when things appeared (at least for me as an individual) most hopeless," Ellison once said.

After the family returned to Oklahoma, Ellison worked variously as a shoeshine boy, a busboy, a hotel waiter, and an assistant in a dentist's office. Embarking on his lifelong habit of seeking out mentors and protectors, the adolescent Ellison also fell under the sway of a neighborhood youth who aspired to be an artist. The boy's father was an amateur musician who gave Ellison free lessons

on the alto saxophone and trumpet; he eventually became his school bandmaster. Meanwhile, he was reading, desperate to become a "renaissance man," skilled in all the arts. After twice applying for admission to Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, a prestigious all-black university founded by Booker T. Washington, he was finally granted a spot in 1933; the orchestra needed a trumpet player.

Ellison's "American Negro faith" in higher education was put to the test at Tuskegee. The school was as class-conscious as most white institutions, and Ellison, who'd had to hop freight trains to get to Alabama because he couldn't afford the fare, felt the pinch at once. Eager to belong to the universe of "Sunday clothes," he badgered the already overextended Ida to send him the money he needed to keep up appearances. ("You know I travel with the rich gang here, and this clothes prob-

lem is a pain," he wrote peevishly.) "For Ralph, helping him achieve his goals now seemed to be Ida's main purpose in life," Rampersad observes dryly.

In 1934, Ellison took a job as a desk clerk at the university library. There, his real education began. Roaming the stacks, Ellison consumed texts by Eugene O'Neill, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce. The librarian, Walter Bowie Williams, who had gone to college in the North and was somewhat ill at ease in the South, was delighted to share his knowledge with his new disciple. But it was the "aesthete" English instructor Morteza Drezel Sprague who alerted Ellison and a number of other students to the possibilities of literature as a living art. (Dedicating "Shadow and Act" to Sprague, Ellison immortalized him as "A Dedicated Dreamer in a Land Most Strange.") Sprague introduced Ellison to the glamour he would always associate with the literary life, lending him copies of *Esquire*, at a time when the magazine was publishing young writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Irwin Shaw. He also turned Ellison on to Hardy's "Jude the Obscure" and Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment," whose brilliant, tortured anti-heroes Ellison identified with. (Fifteen years later, he would create one of his own.)

Like Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, Ellison had the prickly nature of a high-minded moralist, intolerant of any standards other than those he imposed on himself and the rest of the world. (Rampersad peppers his book with Ellison's anti-gay remarks, including one in which the writer accuses homosexual officials of having "hounded" him out of college. Further evidence of Ellison's moral/sexual barometer can be found in his letters. Of James Baldwin, for instance, he wrote in 1953, "He doesn't know the difference between getting religion and going homo.") As every snob knows, snobbery has nothing to do with having money. Being broke and obscure at Tuskegee served a purpose for Ellison: it sharpened his satirical lens. Standing apart from the university's air of sanctimonious Negritude enabled him to write about it. In "Invisible Man," he looks back with scorn and despair on the snivelling ethos that ruled at Tuskegee. He is also clearly torn by the allegiance he feels to his mother's belief in the possibility of a bet-

ter life for her children. The tension between belief and skepticism is palpable as Ellison's narrator stands in the college chapel with a collection of students and visiting dignitaries:

Around me the students move with faces frozen in solemn masks, and I seem to hear already the voices mechanically raised in the songs the visitors loved. (Loved? Demanded. . . . Loved as the defeated come to love the symbols of their conquerors. A gesture of acceptance, of terms laid down and reluctantly approved.) . . . And I remember, too, the talks of visiting speakers, all eager to inform us of how fortunate we were to be a part of the "vast" and formal ritual. How fortunate to belong to this family sheltered from those lost in ignorance and darkness.

Here upon this stage the black rite of Horatio Alger was performed to God's own acting script, with millionaires come down to portray themselves; not merely acting out the myth of their goodness, and wealth and success and power and benevolence and authority in cardboard masks, but themselves, these virtues concretely! Not the wafer and the wine, but the flesh and the blood, vibrant and alive, and vibrant even when stooped, ancient and withered. (And who, in face of this, would not believe? Could even doubt?)

Ellison left Alabama for New York in the summer of 1936, planning to return to Tuskegee that fall, after earning a little money and pursuing a desire to become a sculptor. He did neither. Instead, the artist who had yet to find his art took a room at the Y.M.C.A. on 135th Street, in Harlem, which was still considered the culture capital of black America. (Later, he insisted, "I did *not* come to New York to live in Harlem; I was not exchanging Southern segregation for Northern segregation.") As he cast about for something to do—or, more specifically, for someone to become—luck arrived in the figure of the thirty-four-year-old poet, playwright, and columnist Langston Hughes. Ellison, spotting Hughes with a mutual acquaintance in the lobby of the Y, introduced himself. During the Depression, Hughes had been Harlem's unofficial diplomat. He was one of the nation's most famous black writers; he was also, crucially for Ellison, one of relatively few who could make a living from their pen. And he was known for being exceptionally generous to younger artists. Right off, he gave Ellison some useful advice: "Be nice to people, and let them pay for meals." He also began sending him books. (A few years later, Ellison repaid his mentor by trashing his memoir, "The Big Sea." "In the style of 'The Big

Sea,' too much attention is apt to be given to the esthetic aspects of experience at the expense of its deeper meanings," Ellison wrote in *New Masses* in 1940. "To be effective the Negro writer must be explicit; thus realistic; thus dramatic.")

Through Hughes, Ellison gained entry into the Communist-leaning, black literary elite for whom he became, in time, the Great Black Hope—but not before displacing another mentor, Richard Wright. By 1938, Wright had made a name for himself as a fiction writer and a critic of note for papers such as *New Masses*. The grandson of slaves, he had worked his way from his home town in Mississippi to a position as the intellectual darling (some would say stooge) of the Communist Party. He was happy to nurture young men who lacked a loving paternal presence, so long as they did not contradict whatever views he held at the time. When he met Ellison, he was editing a magazine called *New Challenge* and he suggested that Ralph try his hand at a short story. "I tried to use my knowledge of riding freight trains," Ellison recalled in 1954. "He liked the story well enough to accept it, and it got as far as the galley proofs when it was bumped from the issue because there was too much material. Just after that the magazine failed." Wright, in fact, was not entirely supportive of Ellison's skills as a fiction writer: reading Ellison's early stories, he was annoyed by their borrowings from his own work. Later, Ellison wrote, "No, Wright was no spiritual father of mine, certainly in no sense I recognize. . . . I simply stepped around him." After Wright emigrated to Paris, in 1947, Ellison kept in touch by writing letters, in which he unstintingly repeated any disparaging remarks other writers had made about the great man.

With Wright's help, Ellison became, in 1938, a member of the New York Writers' Project, an offshoot of the Works Progress Administration. Along with thirty other writers and researchers, he was responsible for producing a comprehensive study called "The Negro in New York." The same year, Ellison married Rose Poindexter, a performer who had made her name in the famous "Blackbirds" revue of 1929. For Ellison, having the right wife was a necessity if he was going to be a writer of note, and Rose had an excellent professional pedigree. Ram-

persad writes, "Ralph was looking for a woman physically attractive and smart who would love, honor, and obey him—but not challenge his intellect. . . . Adding to her appeal, no doubt, was the fact that she had a fairly steady income." After their marriage, for a time the couple lived in Rose's apartment, at 312 West 122nd Street; later, when Rose's income dwindled, they moved to 453 West 140th Street, where Ellison was given a reduced rent in exchange for working as the building's superintendent. Naturally, he was reluctant to do the job and he let the other tenants know it. In 1941, he embarked on a brief but intense affair with Sanora Babb, a white writer seven years his senior. When it ended, Ellison confessed to Rose. In 1943, she and Ellison separated. The same year, he was certified by the U.S. Merchant Marine, and he became a second cook and baker on a Liberty Ship headed for Europe.

Unlike Wright or Baldwin or Chester Himes, Ellison never considered travel abroad as a way of living more freely as a black man. Returning to Harlem in 1945, after an aborted second tour, he set to work with renewed vigor on the twin strains of his ambition: social and literary. As he revealed to Wright, he did not consider himself a natural novelist, but he was determined to write a long work of fiction. He had come of age, after all, during the days of the Great American Novel, a time when, if you wanted to be considered a serious male writer—in the model of Hemingway, whom Ellison called his "father-as-artist"—you wrote novels.

The opening of "Invisible Man" was one of the few sections that came easily to Ellison. One wonders, while following the story of the book's creation in Rampersad's biography, whether the struggle that he subsequently faced had something to do with his unwillingness to abandon literary society while he wrote it. He did not, as is commonly believed, concentrate on the book to the exclusion of everything else. Instead, he was busy enlisting the support of a rich leftist, Ida Guggenheimer, who helped him during the writing of his novel, and it's telling that he dedicated "Invisible Man" to her, rather than to the woman he married in the same period: Fanny McConnell Buford, a Kentuckian, who worked a series

of administrative jobs, paid the rent, and picked up the groceries, while keeping tabs on Ellison's ever-increasing social prestige. "We now have the Steins, the Steegmullers, the Guggenheimers and the Binswangers taking care of our interests in every way they possibly can. Well, anything for the book," she wrote in a letter to Ralph. Ellison was sometimes unkind to Fanny (while the couple were guests of the American Academy in Rome in the mid-fifties, he took a cruel pleasure in describing to her the affair he was carrying on with another woman—justifying his behavior with the excuse that Fanny was beyond her childbearing years), but he provided her with the kind of life she desired: Fanny was as interested in his fame as he was in being famous.

Ellison also began to cultivate relationships with white writers and academics such as Stanley Edgar Hyman and Robert Penn Warren. He sought to emulate the writers who gave him a sense of himself as an artist, not just as a black man. In one of his best essays, "The World and the Jug," published in *The New Leader* in two parts, in 1963 and 1964, Ellison partly responds to an essay by the critic and editor Irving Howe, "Black Boys and Native Sons." In it, Howe accused Ellison of literary racism, for having turned his back on Wright and on the burgeoning Black Power movement. "Do you still ask why Hemingway was more important to me than Wright?" Ellison writes. "Not because he was white, or more 'accepted.' But because he appreciated the things of this earth which I love and which Wright was too driven or deprived or inexperienced to know. . . . But most important because Hemingway was a greater artist than Wright, who although a Negro like myself, and perhaps a great man, understood little if anything of these, at least to me, important things." In Hemingway's work, as well as in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," Ellison claimed to have found a language that evoked the improvisatory sound of jazz or the rhythm of the blues, which he deemed "perhaps as close as Americans can come to expressing the spirit of tragedy."

Ellison's emotional tone was inspired by the mournful, joyous, and sharp-witted sound he found in Louis Armstrong's recordings. His technique, though, was

almost exclusively mined from white writers, mostly notably Faulkner, for whom Ellison felt a reverence that almost did him in as a novelist in later years. The searing radicalism of his approach in "Invisible Man," which presaged such post-modernist black American authors as Henry Dumas, Ishmael Reed, and Adrienne Kennedy, came at a price: Ellison never believed that blackness alone—its voice, its culture, its symbols, and its myths—was *literary* enough for a novel. Rampersad, who invested years in his biography of Hughes, seems to take this rejection personally. "Ellison's own view of many if not most African-American educators, scholars, preachers, political leaders, and artists would often be intensely critical," he writes. "That critical instinct freed him to ascend, without inhibition, the heights of the Euro-American artistic and intellectual tradition (but it may well have been a decisive factor in his eventual decline as an artist, because it took a toll on his imagination and morale)." In the sixties, when the country was overrun with racial protest, Ellison avoided speaking publicly on segregation, or on the brutality waged against blacks by the state. At the same time, he refused to acknowledge his alienation from most of his black intellectual peers. In "The World and the Jug," he wrote, somewhat disingenuously, "I assure you that no Negroes are beating down my door, putting pressure on me to join the Negro Freedom Movement, for the simple reason that they realize that I am enlisted for the duration. Such pressure is coming only from a few disinterested 'military advisers,' since Negroes want no more fairly articulate would-be Negro leaders cluttering up the airways."

As Rampersad takes us through the writing and publication of "Invisible Man," Ellison's subsequent embrace by the literary establishment, his essay writing, and his periods of drunkenness, he implies that Ellison's failure to align himself with other blacks was what prevented him from continuing his career as a novelist. After "Invisible Man" became what Rampersad calls a "monument," its author, too, was calcified. In the mid-sixties and beyond, Ellison was still defending the credo he had laid down in his 1945 review of Bucklin Moon's "Primer for the White Folks." Moon's anthology, he argued, was "valuable for something practically missing from American writing

[*Two Nights — One Day*]

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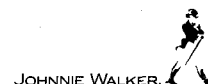
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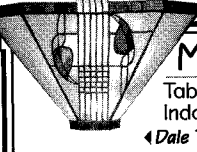
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since 'Huckleberry Finn': a search for images of black and white fraternity."

While Ellison did try to explore this idea in "Juneteenth," his integrationism was, ultimately, aesthetic, not racial. Though he relished the combined effect that Eliot and Armstrong had on his consciousness, for instance, he might have been slightly less concerned with bringing them together off the page. Rampersad delineates, in the second half of his book, how little effort Ellison made to follow his own advice to bring living blacks and whites together. One need simply look at the list of his friends: among them, William and Rose Styron, Kenneth Burke, R. W. B. Lewis, Richard Wilbur, and John Cheever, whose patrician tone Ellison admired and who helped him gain entry to the Century Club. (Once elected, he closed ranks with other members to keep women out.) Ellison was often the only black in the room. (The exception on his social roster was the black novelist and critic Albert Murray, who shared some of Ellison's aesthetic principles.) Ellison's distaste for "ordinary" blacks was wedded to the personal: to the poverty and self-neglect, the political and economic marginalization that he had witnessed and experienced in Oklahoma and Harlem, and which he could not wait to put behind him. He also never got over the assertion in one of his college sociology textbooks that the Negro was, "so to speak, the lady among the races." Was he not a man? Could only white men lay claim to the world's riches? (In an odd bit of macho identification, Ellison argued, in "The World and the Jug," that Hemingway appreciated "the things of this earth which I love . . . : weather, guns, dogs, horses. . . . He wrote with such precision about the processes and techniques of daily living that I could keep myself and my brother alive during the 1937 Recession by following his descriptions of wing-shooting.")

Until his death, Ellison struggled to complete "Juneteenth." Although there are sections of oratorical brilliance, such as "Cadillac Flambé," published by the *American Review* in 1973—which, while making the surrealism of "Invisible Man" seem almost tame, hints at the ways in which the politically charged America of the nineteen-sixties was commercially as well as racially driven—the book never became a cohesive whole.

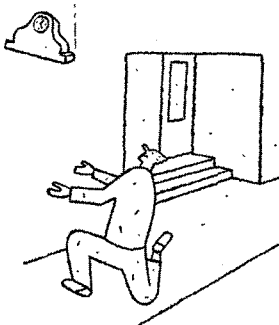
(The two-thousand-page manuscript was posthumously edited and published in incomplete form in 1999.) This failure was due partly to Ellison's attempt to incorporate Faulkner's vast range and scope into a single work—a task that even Faulkner never accomplished—and partly to the fact that he didn't manage to follow his own early advice to Wright: he never quite found the explicit reality of his characters. Ellison coasted for more than forty years on the success of "Invisible Man." He became a grand old man of letters, taking chairs at universities—and ignoring whatever young black writers came his way. (In a bit of mischief, Rampersad notes that a certain "scholar of Langston Hughes" visited Ellison once and was not offered refreshments. Later, the same scholar discovered that the visit had been written off as a twenty-five-dollar expense on Ellison's taxes.)

Whereas Rampersad maintained a strictly reverent tone in his books on Hughes and Jackie Robinson, in his confrontations with this thorny and complex character he has taken on a new approach: an unhallowed view of his subject. He treats Ellison as a man, not as a deity, and he does so through the accumulation of historical fact, solid reporting, and detail. He repeatedly refuses to take Ellison's word over the textual evidence. The pain that Ellison must have experienced during his long fallow period should not be underestimated, but one comes away from Rampersad's book feeling that even that anguish was a little engineered: the longer Ellison took to write his second novel, the more serious an author he would appear to be, the less vulnerable to criticism. One feels oppressed by the emotional and intellectual knots in which Ellison bound himself at the end of his life; had he been able to conquer his own caginess and social ambition, he might have produced the work that he and the world were waiting for. And he might have come away with something of the sense of freedom that his namesake described, in the closing remarks of his 1841 lecture "Man the Reformer": "As the farmer casts into the ground the finest ears of his grain, the time will come when we too shall hold nothing back, but shall eagerly convert more than we now possess into means and powers, when we shall be willing to sow the sun and the moon for seeds." ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Greed, by *Elfriede Jelinek*, translated from the German by *Martin Chalmers* (*Seven Stories*; \$24.95). When Jelinek won the Nobel Prize, in 2004, the honor provoked outrage from critics who claimed that her books contain more hateful fury than artistic virtuosity. Her latest novel might appear to bear out this view. Its tone is contemptuous, and its plot—centering on a murderous country policeman who seduces local women in order to acquire their property—is confusing and skeletal. But Jelinek has a way of provoking us to reexamine our instinct to recoil. The bitterness of her narrative voice conceals a perverse humor; rain doesn't merely "fall to the surface of the earth as precipitation, it would rather precipitate downright dejection in someone who . . . had been hoping for better weather." And in the final pages a glint of empathy emerges from her derision, in the recognition that "love doesn't pull down barriers, as is often said, it builds them up."

Acceptance, by *Susan Coll* (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*; \$23). This delightfully acerbic sendup of the college admissions process is set in a tony suburb of Washington, D.C. A group of overachieving students (a "cluster of brainpower . . . packed so tight, it was like the inner loop of the Beltway at rush hour") fight for what seems an ever-narrowing pool of Ivy League spots (the only ones that matter), state-university scholarships (for the rare student who is financially challenged), and liberal-arts places ("safeties"). The view from the other side of the desk is provided by a character in the admissions department of a newly popular college in upstate New York, which is trawling for kids whose parents can pay for new campus facilities. Coll is alert to the comedy—and the pathos—of a system that leads high-school seniors to solicit recommendation letters from their pediatricians.



When a Crocodile Eats the Sun, by *Peter Godwin* (*Little, Brown*; \$24.99). Godwin, the author of a previous memoir about growing up during Zimbabwe's war of independence, has written a sequel of sorts, tracing the collapse of his country in the course of the past decade (the violently destructive Robert Mugabe is the "crocodile" of the title) in tandem with the decline of his father. The memoir's central drama comes from the dying father's revelation that he is not British at all, as his son had always believed, but a Polish Jew, born *Kazimierz Jerzy Goldfarb*, whose mother and sister were killed in Treblinka. Occasionally, Godwin's attempts to knit the various story lines together seem a bit pat—"A white in Africa is like a Jew everywhere . . . waiting for the next great tidal swell of hostility"—but he ultimately delivers a powerful narrative of grief and desperation, both personal and national.

Dry Manhattan, by *Michael A. Lerner* (*Harvard*; \$28.95). Nowhere was Prohibition more keenly felt or more hotly contested, Lerner argues, than in the diverse cosmopolis of New York City. The city's immigrant and working-class populations, disproportionately targeted by the dry lobby, resisted in great numbers by distilling their own alcohol and frequenting speak-easies. Meanwhile, liberalized ideas about drinking, sex, and leisure bred cultural rebellion in the middle classes, whose alcohol-filled night life became the subject of magazine reportage. But illegal alcohol also fostered graft, organized crime, and violence, and, as concern over the Eighteenth Amendment became more widespread, the city organized politically. The Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform, founded in New York, became the largest repeal group in the nation, and Governor Alfred E. Smith—the country's Democratic Party leader on the issue—emerged as the "wet hope of the nation."

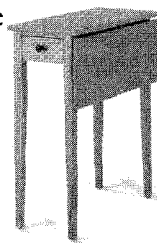
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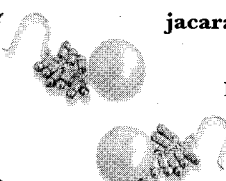


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PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

Noah Haidle and S. N. Behrman on the creative life.

BY JOHN LAHR

To show brilliance, you have to have shadow; but to show shadow you also have to have brilliance. With the new comedy "Persephone" (crisply directed by Nicholas Martin at the Calderwood Pavilion, in Boston), the playwright Noah Haidle has taken on one of the Greeks' bleakest myths as a kind of test of his play-making chops—the

to back up his ambition for originality.

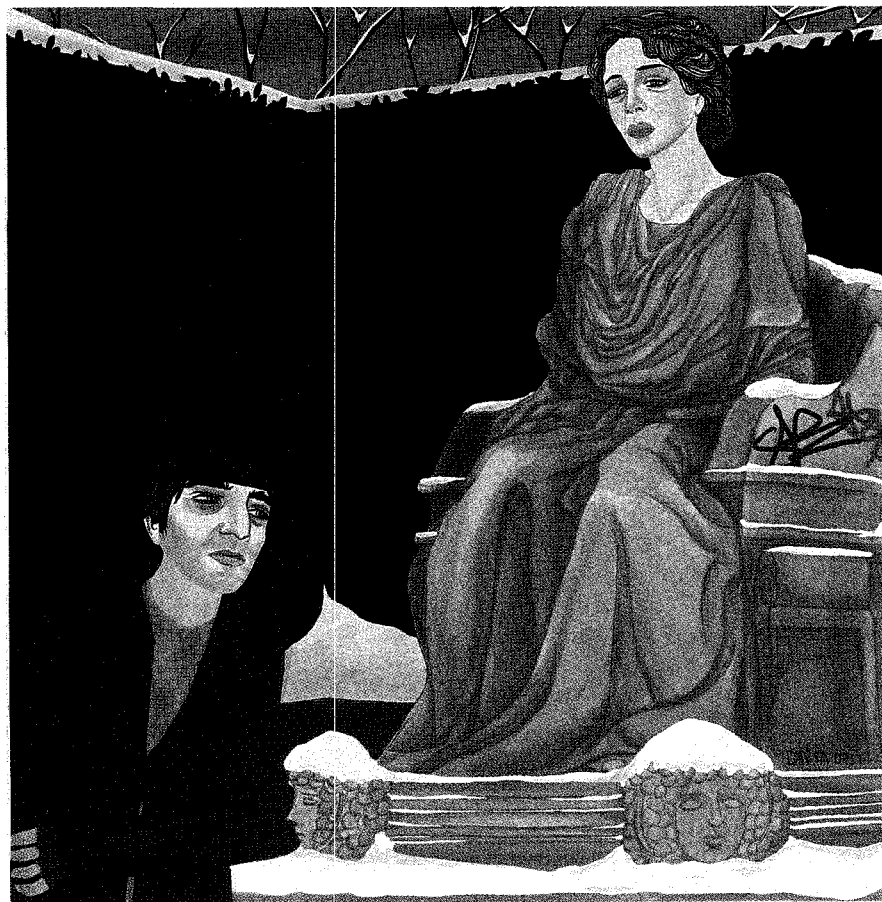
Here, in the first act, Giuseppe (Seth Fisher), a Florentine sculptor in 1507, chisels away at a block of marble that is slowly taking shape as a statue of the forlorn Demeter, mourning for her daughter Persephone, who has been abducted to the underworld. "Today we might make a great work of art or a complete failure,"

the passion that the artist lavishes on her extremities. "Please rub me like this forever," she coos. "Don't let anything come between us." However, more or less everything comes between Giuseppe and his creation: his Philistine patron, his louche model, and his own priapic preoccupations. Even the sour mouse (Jeremiah Kissel) who lives in Giuseppe's studio gets a word in. "Talking about how he can't represent reality with his hands," the mouse rails. "Why can't I have eyes in my hands?" Boo-fucking-hoo." Nonetheless, Giuseppe does finally overcome his block and breathe life into the inanimate; Demeter becomes his masterpiece.

At once a romp and a rumination about creativity, "Persephone" insists on seeing life from the artifact's point of view. As Giuseppe works away, David Korin's adroitly designed pedestal slowly collapses to reveal Demeter's definition and completion. "I take my shape. I come to life," she says. She is realized, but Giuseppe is not. ("He cannot fulfill the potential the world declares for him," Demeter says, adding portentously, "He will not speak for the final twenty years of his life.") The great paradox of creativity, Haidle seems to suggest, is that the artist, in the act of expression, sees deeper into the nature of existence and, at the same time, moves farther away from it.

Still, despite the many storytelling opportunities Haidle takes here—opportunities for surreal wit, visual surprise, and downright silliness—he misses one strategic one: the opportunity to get lucky, narratively speaking. His heroine, who never moves, limits his imagination, as well as the dynamic possibilities of the stage. Demeter is the focus of the play, but because her words mostly go unheard by the characters around her, she has no agency. The corner into which Haidle has painted himself is almost immediately apparent in Act II, which takes place in the present, with Demeter occupying what seems to be a corner of Bryant Park, behind the New York Public Library. She is now missing her arms—they were amputated by Giuseppe, who destroyed all his other sculptures before he died. She is crippled, and so is the playwright.

Demeter's name means Mother Earth; her bipolar mood swings account for the seasons. Act II begins as a wintry urban spectacle; the usual suspects of contemporary barbarity—flashers, prostitutes, anti-



Melinda Lopez as a mistreated statue of Demeter in Noah Haidle's "Persephone."

theatrical equivalent of extreme sports. Haidle, who is twenty-eight, is precocious and formidably talented, with a sort of freewheeling intuitive daring. He has the confidence not to try to appeal to the audience's notion of entertainment, and, as his earlier plays, "Mr. Marmalade" and "Vigils," demonstrated, he has a firm command of the theatrical idiom

Giuseppe says. "No time for blocks. Everything hangs in the balance." This being a Haidle fantasia, the statue (Melinda Lopez) reacts. "I am ready, Giuseppe. Do with me what you will," she says. (We hear her, but Giuseppe doesn't.) The unfinished and immobile Demeter turns out to be the play's narrator: a charming, competitive chatterbox who reciprocates

Semites, corrupt cops, graffiti louts, the homeless, the suicidal, rapists, and thieves, as well as pigeons—all leave little dollops of degradation in front of her. The parade of human misery turns quickly into thematic and visual monotony. “I would give anything to look away,” she says. “But I am an eternal witness to the world.” Haidle’s subtitle for the play is “Slow Time.” When Persephone does finally rise up from the underworld, the slow time turns to good time: the topiary hedges behind Demeter bloom with red flowers, silver glitter falls from the sky, and she is released from her depression. “I’ve been waiting so long!” Demeter says. “Here I come, baby. Here I come!” But, for all its razzmatazz, the play’s final moment of celebration is unearned. You can’t have comic liberation without comic penetration, and blowing a raspberry at despondency doesn’t cut it. Next time out, Haidle needs to be more ruthless, both with his characters and with himself. Comedy may be a banquet, but, as the philosopher said, without a killing there is no feast.

A sense of comic satisfaction is what the audience takes away from the splendid revival of S. N. Behrman’s 1932 hit “Biography” (well cast and well directed by J. R. Sullivan at the Pearl). These days Behrman is remembered as a screenwriter (“Queen Christina,” with Greta Garbo), a musical librettist (“Fanny”), and a biographer (“Duveen”); but, in his time, he was best known for his urbane and erudite light touch on the Broadway stage. The revival of “Biography” makes a good case for his reinstatement to the theatrical pantheon.

Here, Behrman pits the audacious and well-named magazine editor Richard Kurt (the excellent Sean McNall)—“he has the intensity of the fanatic and the carelessness of the vagabond,” the stage directions read—against the hectic, emollient charm of the portrait painter Marion Froude (the expert Carolyn McCormick). Froude is a model of big-hearted bohemianism. She can turn a phrase and an eye; she teases, but she’s not bitchy. She is, as she says, a “laissez-faire girl,” and she provided, in 1932, an early sighting on the Broadway stage of a fully furbished and independent American female mind. Froude is known for her portraits of the power brokers of her day. “You’d be

surprised how accessible some of the inaccessible people are,” she says. She knows languages, countries, men, and herself. Welcome is her defining gesture; in one way or another, she embraces everything she encounters. As Behrman has imagined her, Froude is a sort of early Katharine Hepburn, with instinctive wisdom in place of defensive wisecracks. The comedy revolves around the legend of Froude’s full life. Kurt arrives with a check and an offer to serialize her story. “You may be disappointed,” Froude says, before accepting. “You probably see headlines. . . . The Last of the Great Adventuresses, The Magda Who Wouldn’t Go Home, The Woman of a Thousand—I beg your pardon—a Hundred Affairs.”

Behrman’s style was clearly influenced by the sophisticated, high-stepping comedies of Noël Coward, who was the self-proclaimed “big celebrated cookie” of Behrman’s theatrical heyday. But where “the Master” used flippancy as a subversive, high-camp attack on normality, Behrman abdicates brittle impudence for wry tolerance. In effect, this difference in tone and emotion is the same as the one between Froude and the arch Kurt. Kurt mistakes Froude’s humanity for frivolity. “You’re superficial and casual and irresponsible,” he tells her. “You take life, which is a tragic thing, as though it were a trivial bedroom farce.” Froude dismisses Kurt’s simplification as “a defect of the radical and the young.” He says, “You don’t recognize seriousness when you see it.” “It’s the serious people who are funny,” she replies. If “Biography” doesn’t have the ingenious plotting of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur’s “Front Page,” it has a series of literate, well-observed cameos—the Hollywood star, the European composer, the aspiring senator, the macho mogul, the aggrieved fiancé—all of whom stir the pot and allow Froude to display her cunning and her compassion.

In Marion Froude, Behrman created a wonderful heroine, whose defining quality is not her narcissism but her receptivity. She lives in the world, not in herself. And this well-wrought comedy manages to catch the openness of heart that makes both her courage and her vulnerability irresistible. “I’ve always lived in such a rush—a kind of interminable scherzo,” she says at one point. She pauses. “Interminable scherzo”? How do you spell it? ♦

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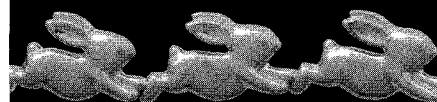


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ARMY OF TWO

New albums from Tori Amos and Björk.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

By the time Tori Amos was thirty, she had been through several drafts of a career. A child piano prodigy, she was the youngest person ever to attend the Peabody Conservatory of Music, in Baltimore. (She was five when she auditioned.) In her early twenties, she was the lone woman in a rock band called Y Kant Tori Read. (The group released a single album, which sold fewer than ten thousand copies.) In 1992, after some wrangling with Atlantic Records, whose executives were apparently dubious about the commercial potential of what they called “this girl-at-her-piano thing,” she released a solo album, “Little Earthquakes,” on which she sang about Christianity, body image, and, in the remarkable song “Me and a Gun,” rape, often with the force and sometimes even the sound of her idol, Robert Plant. “Little Earthquakes” was the first in a series of albums by Amos which helped prove that a girl at her piano could make songs that were as artistically complex and, at times, just as popular as those of a shaggy boy with an electric guitar.

A year later, the Icelandic musician Björk released her first solo album, “Debut.” Like Amos, Björk had recently left a rock band full of men, the Sugarcubes, a successful independent group and the fourth she had been in since she started playing piano and singing publicly, at the age of eleven. Björk’s main instrument is her voice, a glassy, elastic alto with the sonic power and range of an electric guitar. She found inspiration in dance music and the electronic instruments used to make it, increasingly avoiding anything resembling a traditional rhythm section. Amos’s music draws on the baroque songwriting and melodramatic vocals of Kate Bush and the long, expert melodies of Joni Mitchell, and she favors a lineup of bass, guitar, and drums behind her piano.

Amos and Björk are now in their

early forties, mothers and artists in a market that has shown little interest in promoting women much over the age of consent, especially avowed feminists who invoke goddesses and (in Björk’s case) will wear a swan in place of a ball gown. Both are releasing new albums this month. Stylistically very different, Amos’s “American Doll Posse” and Björk’s “Volta” are two examples of how a female pop musician can maintain her career without compromising her politics.

In a recent interview with the online magazine *Pitchfork*, Björk said of “Volta,” “It’s sort of maybe trying to put out some good vibes for the little princesses out there.” She added, “All they want to do is be pretty and find their prince, and I’m, like, what happened to feminism?” Her lyrics are usually less direct. One form her feminism takes is simply ignoring conventional wisdom. Many artists would hesitate to appear on an album cover, as Björk does on “Volta,” in what seems to be an enormous dodo-bird suit covered with a melted sangria candle, especially an attractive woman who could win over all sorts of people by wearing, say, a tighter dodo suit.

The album begins with a rebuke to the White House: “Earth Intruders,” an odd and boisterous song inspired by a visit that Björk made to Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami. There she envisioned a wave of people taking political action, an image that she described to *Pitchfork*: “Maybe a tsunami of people would just come and hit the White House and scrape it off the ground and do some justice.”

The music for the song was provided by the ubiquitous producer Timbaland, who in 1999 sampled her majestic track “Jóga” for a remix of Missy Elliott’s song “Hit’Em wit da Hee.” On “Earth Intruders,” Timbaland bisects a clomping dance with nasty synthesizer

howls. Björk begins singing in her full-chest voice—one of pop’s most reliably ecstatic stimuli for the past fifteen years. “Turmoil . . . carnage,” she says, dragging out each word. She speaks the chorus at low volume, nestling the words in the blend of live drum sounds and digital cries: “Here come the earth intruders; there’ll be no resistance. We are the cannoneers, necessary voodoo.” “Earth Intruders” alludes only briefly to her Indonesian epiphany: “And the beast with many heads and arms rolling, steamroller.” Björk has no obligation to make her politics explicit, but it’s a shame that she keeps her anger cloaked. (Of her intentions for “Volta,” she has said, “It’s 2007. It’s not some hippie shit—‘go-back-to-your-roots.’ It’s all march forward.”) Had she included one or two specific references—Washington, cowboys, Black Hawk helicopters—“Earth Intruders” could have grown fangs without becoming preachy.

Björk’s collaborators on “Volta” are eclectic to a fault: the Congolese group Konono No. 1, which plays amplified kalimbas; the frantic drummer Brian Chippendale, of the American duo Lightning Bolt; a ten-piece all-female Icelandic brass band; and a Chinese pipa player, among others. This musical solicitude is a testament to Björk’s fearless curiosity, but her restlessness can be wearying. When disparate teams of musicians attempt to realize one musician’s ideas, every song becomes yet another stone turned over rather than one put in place. On “Volta,” melodic motifs rarely repeat the way they do in most songs, and many of Björk’s vocal performances feel like improvisations.

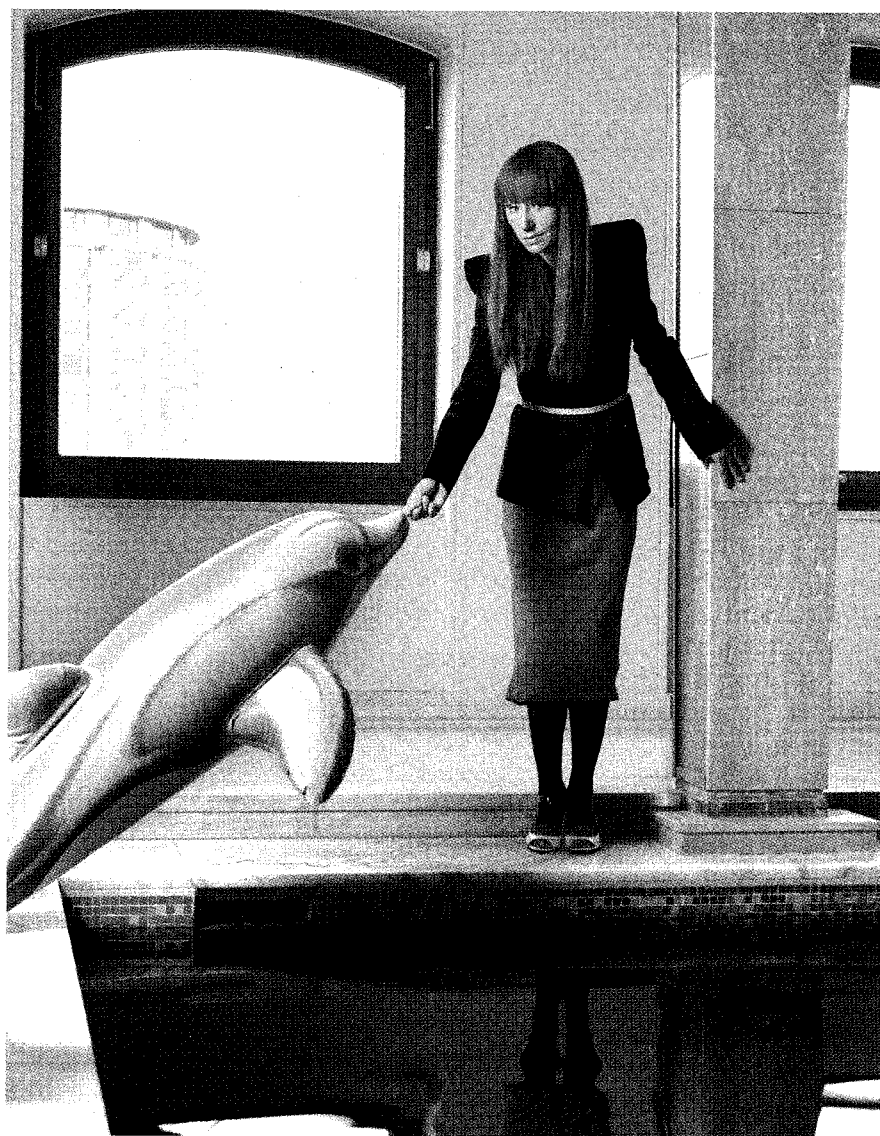
In “Vertebrae by Vertebrae,” the brass band plays a low chord twice, then moves up a whole step to play another chord four times, and then stops. Though you’re hearing a live band, the music has the feel of a loop, like a Steve Reich ostinato slowed way down. Twice, the music dissolves into parallel sheets of sound; Björk’s voice is reproduced electronically, creating a harmonic foam, while the horns play discrete lines. There’s a looped beat in the murk somewhere, though no one seems to be playing to it, and it’s hard to identify a motif, despite a surfeit of melodic material. “Vertebrae” is one of many songs in which Björk—who grew up with the

simple populism of punk, and who launched her solo career by exploiting the equally basic populism of dance beats—makes music that has little to do with pop. Several horn passages in “Vertebrae” and “Wanderlust” have a hypnotic grace, and “Pneumonia,” one of the few tracks not cluttered with sound, presents a gorgeous chamber-music-style arrangement of horns and voice for what could be Björk’s mission statement: “To shut yourself off would be the hugest crime of all.”

Shutting off is not often a problem for Amos. “American Doll Posse” is aggressive and, occasionally, overstated; Amos fans who have complained that they haven’t heard from “the real Tori” in a while will be relieved. In the past three years, Amos has released only one complete album, “The Beekeeper” (2005), which buried her natural vigor under music that occasionally incorporated gospel and R. & B. but in the end was lax and weirdly docile. “American Doll Posse” returns to her music of the nineties: fired-up songs centered on the piano, her robust singing, a rhythm section, and loud guitar playing more indebted to the seventies than to the ohs.

The album title refers to characters that Amos created for the record: Pip, Tori, Clyde, Santa, and Isabel. These women appear on the cover, five Amoses digitally manipulated to occupy a single space. The one called Tori has long, straight red hair and bangs, wears a floor-length dark skirt, and holds a chicken. (The concept owes much to the work of the artist Cindy Sherman.) If you do some research on the Internet, you can figure out which character sings which track, but this is unnecessary. Amos has always played a variety of characters in her songs; it wouldn’t be a stretch to say that her work is concerned primarily with how different women experience the world. (Amos once said in a television interview that she was elected homecoming queen simply because she had made an effort to talk to all the girls in her high school.)

Amos’s album, like Björk’s, begins with a rebuke to the Bush Administration: “Yo George,” a dirge for piano and voice, in which Amos (as Pip) sings



Amos's songs always feature a variety of characters. Photograph by Jillian Edelstein.

about the “madness of King George” and asks, tremulously, “Where have we gone wrong, America?” She must know that the public-service announcement is a dicey gambit; the song is only eighty-five seconds long. On “Big Wheel,” a rhythmically assured rock song that features a distorted slide guitar, Amos sings as a woman who is claiming her independence: “Baby, I don’t need your cash, mama got it all in hand now.” And in “Secret Spell” she sings to a younger woman, maybe herself: “Jumps at three, tears at thirteen, just turn you around for eighteen wheels in a high heel, just turn you around, sold a dream at twenty-three.” The guitars on “Secret Spell” are reminiscent of songs by R.E.M., a group whose plangent, chiming guitar style has not been reprised in the twenty-first century as often as, say, U2’s has.

Amos’s anger is appealing, especially when she’s parsing gender stereotypes. She takes on the acronym MILF—a term that “Tori” decides she likes—and a more ageless insult, “fat slut,” which becomes a character in a song of the same name. Björk’s concerns on “Volta” tend to be more global, but “Declare Independence,” a brief punk rant, contains a lyric that would work just as well in a song by Amos: “Declare independence. Don’t let them do that to you. Make your own flag. Raise your flag!” ♦

From the Washington Post.

In a voice completely foreign to the crisp polite voice that had previously announced our upcoming stops, a strained, horse voice screamed out of the intercom at me. “You are not supposed to be on the train!”

Clearly an equine-only conveyance.

ACTING OUT

"Spider-Man 3" and "The Treatment."

BY ANTHONY LANE

There is one great scene in "Spider-Man 3," and you can pretty much leave the theatre once it's over, but for those three or four minutes you wouldn't want to be anywhere else. An escaped convict named Flint Marko (Thomas Haden Church) flees the New York City police and tumbles, as you do, into a Particle Physics Test Facility. He finds himself in a sandpit, subjected to what we are told is "demolecularization," a process familiar to anyone who pounds crackers to make a cheesecake crust. Once the experiment is over, the sand lies still; then it stirs and heaves, and, like a crumbling Lazarus, Marko rises again, his legs sifting and scattering with the effort. Finally, he staggers upright to reveal his transfigured self: Sandman, his flesh and blood blown away for good, and an odd look—part mourning, part implacable resolve—dimly discernible on his granular face. From here on, he will be storming dust, a wondrous mixture of the quick and the dead.

It is thrilling to imagine what Guillermo del Toro, who made "Pan's Labyrinth," or the James Cameron who brought us "Terminator 2: Judgment Day," would do with Sandman. Both directors are obsessed with shape-shifters—with their sad restlessness, their ability to conjure threat out of the apparently fragile. The director of "Spider-Man 3," Sam Raimi, is unconcerned by such niceties; to him, Sandman is just a bullying bad-die against whom Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire) must pit his web and his wits. The film is certainly well stocked with villainy. Besides Sandman, there is the New Goblin (James Franco), better known as Harry Osborn, of whom I had personally had my fill by the end of the first

movie. He is the son of the late Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe), and his agonized, drawn-out desire to make Spider-Man pay for that death makes Hamlet's revenge look like a snap decision. We also have Venom (Topher Grace), who is introduced, with something close to panic, two-thirds of the way through the film. Until then, he has been known

*Spider-Man gets a makeover in Sam Raimi's movie.*

as Eddie Brock, who takes over from Peter Parker—the earthbound, off-duty Spider-Man—as a photographer for the *Daily Bugle*. Eddie then gets fired, and his response, in a radical solution to youth unemployment, is to don a sticky black body stocking and a mouthful of fangs.

The most pathetic aspect of "Spider-Man 3" is that stickiness. In an early

scene, a meteorite crashes to Earth, and from it crawls what seems to be a tiny garbage sack with half a mind of its own: not a bad image of where this film belongs. And, would you believe, the first person this superblob attaches itself to is, yes, Peter Parker. It doesn't choose him; nobody has targeted him—of all Earth's inhabitants, he just happens to be close by. Is this truly the best that the filmmakers can be bothered to do for our delight? Just how easily and stupidly pleased do they presume we are? Peter's college professor (Dylan Baker) declares that the black stuff "amplifies characteristics of its host." Fine, and I vaguely understand what occurs when it latches onto Eddie. The first host, however, is Spider-Man himself, and this is where

the film becomes so embarrassing that you have to crouch down and stuff popcorn in your ears.

The joke about Peter has always been how uncool he is. "You are such a nerd," his girlfriend, Mary Jane (Kirsten Dunst), sighs, thus giving a breath of hope to all the nerds in the audience. Once infected by the black stuff, he should by rights become an über-nerd, but the movie can't decide what it wants. One moment he is being eyed by girls in the street, and the next they are shying away from him, as he struts along like John Travolta at the start of "Saturday Night Fever." You laugh, but the sound of it dies in your throat. Peter then dances in a night club, but unveiling a mean and moody Tobey Maguire is roughly as convincing as asking Norah Jones to rap. Dumbest of all is the change of hair style, as Peter stops combing his bangs sideways and lets them flop down over his brow. He looks like the bronze medalist in a teen-age Hitler-impersonation contest.

Spider-Man, meanwhile, gets his own makeover, oiling into a different outfit (black is the new red), and hanging out moodily on church spires. What is being amplified here?

If "Spider-Man 3" is a shambles, that's because it makes the rules up as it goes along. By the end, for instance, Sandman has become the size of an office block, each swinging fist as big as a truck, his

ISTVAN BANYAI

personality reduced to brutishness. I half expected him to come after Spider-Man and Mary Jane carrying a gigantic bucket and spade. By what criterion did he grow so mountainous? Is he like a Transformer, or more like a genie? The fact is that if the fantastical is to flourish it must lay down the conditions of its magic and abide by them; otherwise, we feel cheated. (Tolkien knew this better than anyone.) Some viewers will take the New Goblin, whose name sounds like a small-circulation poetry magazine, to be a vessel of unnatural forces, while others will see him, when he fires up his rocket-powered skateboard, as a rich kid with too many toys. That's the problem with this third installment of the franchise: not that it's running out of ideas, or lifting them too slavishly from the original comic, but that it lunges at them with an infantile lack of grace, throwing money at one special effect after another and praying—or calculating—that some of them will fly.

In May of 2006, the *Wall Street Journal* suggested that the budget for Raimi's film had swollen to more than two hundred and fifty million dollars, possibly to three hundred million. That's a lot of dough. The government paid less than that in foreign aid to Haiti last year. Still, if the movie performs as expected, the outlay will be swamped by the profit, and one cannot fault Sony and Columbia Pictures for their business sense. What matters, to a moviegoer, is that costs appear to rise in inverse proportion to formal coherence: the more you spend, to judge by "Spider-Man 3," the less control you exert over the finished product. Domestic scenes that would not pass muster in a TV soap are allowed

to drag on forever ("I want to be there for you," "You weren't there for me"), while major plot shifts—the teaming up of Venom and Sandman, say—are patched together in seconds. Fine character actors, such as James Cromwell and Theresa Russell, are handed a token scene and then flicked aside like chewed gum. Bryce Dallas Howard, whose pale and unnerving looks would make her a perfect villainess, is fobbed off with a role of smiling fluff. Laziness mingles with overkill, violence with mawkishness: most of the characters weep at the slightest provocation, but heads are beaten, burned, and sheared off by passing subway trains. "People really like me," our hero says at the start, adding later, "They love me!" Not for long, Whiny-Man, not for long.

Has Sir Ian Holm ever given a bad performance? More to the point, have you ever seen him, even in a small or fleeting role, fail to assume a commanding position—not hogging the limelight but pointing briskly to the unexpected heart of the film? Like Claude Rains, another compact Englishman with a lovely and questioning voice, Holm seems to gather a movie toward him, like a priest with his congregation. That was the case with his royal doctor in "The Madness of King George," and it holds true for another doctor: Ernesto Morales, the Argentinian psychoanalyst Holm plays in "The Treatment." Morales describes himself as "the last great Freudian," and the claim is neither a joke nor a boast. He sits in his New York consulting room, clad in his professional armor of cardigan, tie, and sports jacket,

and calmly dismembers the life—and, more witheringly, the syntax—of a hapless English teacher named Jake Singer (Chris Eigeman). "Constructing passive sentences is a way of concealing your own testicles, lest someone cut them off," Morales says, with no more fuss than a butcher jointing a chicken.

Oren Rudavsky's movie, which he and Daniel Saul Housman adapted from Daniel Menaker's 1998 novel (parts of which first appeared in this magazine), is a slight and rueful affair, intermittently funny, about Jake's attempt to equip himself for the giving and receiving of love. The object of his affections is Allegra Marshall (Famke Janssen), a mother at the private school where Jake teaches. She is tall, luminescent, recently widowed, disturbingly wealthy, and, to my eyes, hundreds of miles out of Jake's league; even as the story clasped them together, I was hoping that she might escape and do better elsewhere. Dr. Morales is also dubious about the union, being concerned solely with "the healthy sexual interest between you and this dowager." Not *that* healthy, I would say; this is one of those courteous tales in which people make love with their clothes on. Who wants to behave well in bed? As the lovers work through their issues, Dr. Morales is shunted to the sidelines. It is as though, to the director's discomfort, he had seen through not just their earnest romance but the civil, erudite mood of the movie. As he says to Jake, "You make from the world a banal comedy, and you are a spectator. You even have a name for it: life in the city." And, with that, an entire genre, on TV as well as on film, falls apart in our useless hands. ♦

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VOLUME LXXXIII, NO. 11, May 7, 2007. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 19 & 26, June 11 & 18, July 9 & 16, September 3 & 10, and December 24 & 31) by Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Louis Cona, vice-president and publisher; Jamie Engel, associate publisher; Alatia Bradley, advertising director; Karen Quinn-Panzer, advertising director; Melissa McCarthy Strome, advertising director; Judy Safir, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, executive director of marketing and strategic planning; Janine Silvera, executive director of creative services; Jacqueline Cinguina, director of integrated marketing; Steve Porter, creative director/advertising; Ellen Reid, creative services director; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast Publications: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Debi Chirichella Sabino, senior vice-president and C.F.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president/human resources. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

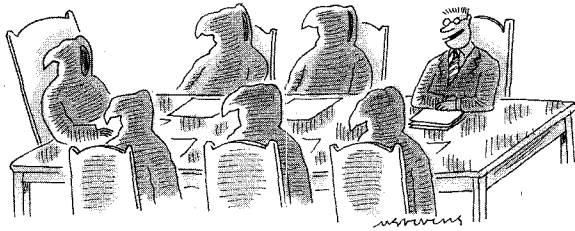
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Frank Cotham, must be received by Sunday, May 6th. Finalists in the April 23rd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 21st issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Perkins here, representing taxes."
Andrew Kosztyo, Daytona Beach, Fla.



THE FINALISTS

"You know, I'm gonna miss this when we go paperless."
Christopher Farber, Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Remember, Paul, when we were interns?"
David Bangs, Pantego, Texas

"Auditing Siegfried and Roy has not been easy."
Charles Wenzel, New York City

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



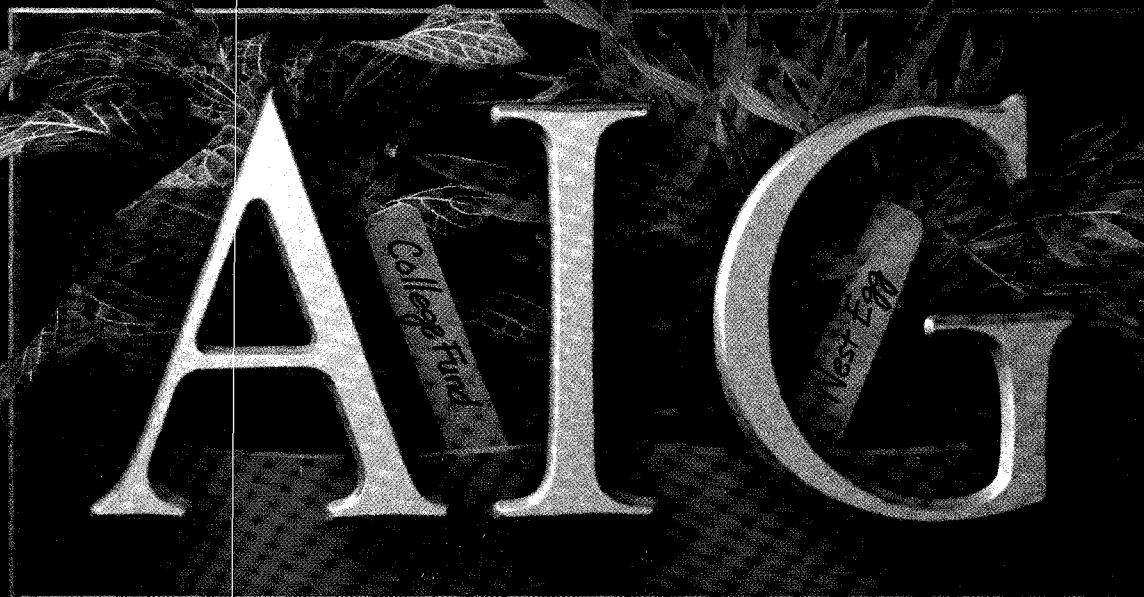


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